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TRIALS;

A TALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE FAVOURITE OF NATURE,"

&c. &c.

To man in this his trial state,
The privilege is given,
When tost by tides of human fate,
To anchor fast on Heaven.

WATTS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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TRIALS.

CHAPTER I.

THOUGH separated only by the distance of a few miles, it had been one of the discomforts of Matilda's wedded life, that it had occasioned a great alteration in her intimacy with Mrs. St. Aubyn. The fact was, that Charles soon discovered the shrewdness of Catherine's observation; and too well knowing that his foibles were not of a kind to escape it, and not particularly relishing, as, in fact, few men did, the satire with which she mingled her quick remarks upon character, he gave but little encouragement to the intimacy which Matilda hoped to have maintained with her in the same degree after her marriage as before.

It was not without doing her utmost to remove it, that Matilda had observed his growing dislike to a friend so dear to her; but she soon found that the taste of a married woman, in her female associates, must of necessity be guided in a great measure by the choice of her husband. It is to no purpose, that she would retain about her, those she loves, unless

they happen to be such as he approves of also, unless his avocations call him pretty much from home. Then, indeed, the favoured friend may approach: but, under such circumstances, her society is rather smuggled than allowed; and the wife, and her ally, if possessed of any feelings of delicacy, generally prefer to such an alternative, the worthy old plan of letting things take their course; a course which not unfrequently ends, in the dissolution, after marriage, of the strongest friendships that were instituted previous to it.

Mrs. St. Aubyn had still a tender interest in all that concerned Matilda, though her feelings were hurt in what she considered her neglect, and her pride was wounded, in what she openly termed the ill-behaviour of Mr. Harcourt. At this period they had not met for many months; and Matilda, with the utmost grief perceiving that she could do nothing to ameliorate the matter, was compelled to wait for time and chance to give her an opportunity of justifying, as well as she could, her seeming neglect of so valued a friend. She every day anticipated the return of Mr. St. Aubyn from the Continent, and the certainty of his calling upon her when he came to town; and to that circumstance she looked forward for her time of explanation. But his stay abroad was protracted beyond her expectations. She had been a wife nearly two years, and still no intelligence of his arrival. Charles, in the mean time, was proceeding in the same course of thoughtless gaiety; and there could not but be moments, when a melancholy idea of having sacrificed herself in marriage, would steal across her thoughts. When every fond

endeavour to retain her husband from the idle amusements which absorbed him, failed to influence—when the book she would have read, the song she would have sung to him, the smiles with which she would have detained him by her side, though prevailing, perhaps, for an occasional hour, were yet no stable, no enduring attraction, she could not but heave a sigh as she thought of past days of elegant and enlightened intercourse—and almost wish that those days had not been so heedlessly—so rapidly resigned.

Not that Matilda was a deserted wife, in the common acceptation of the term. Charles was not so passionately in love with her as he had been; but he was still as strongly attached to her, as it was in his nature to be to any thing he had called his own for two years. But she discovered, when too late, that she had joined her fate with one, of a character, which, of all others (not disgraced by any flagrant vice) is that most calculated to give pain to those connected with it. An austere, or a violent, or a passionate temper, may be accessible, and very commonly is, on the side of sensibility and virtue; but nothing good is within the reach of an unthinking mind. The spirits that would always be gay, always be plunged in a vortex of dissipation, in a world where, on every side, objects for reflection solicit our attention, and seem to intreat our consideration, present the most hopeless of materials for the reformist to work upon.

"I see that there is no hope of him!" said Matilda sorrowfully, one day, after they had just returned from an expensive tour on the Continent, not

from the quiet watering-place, where she had hoped to have composed her own mind; and in some degree improved his, by an interval of quiet and reflection; "I am afraid there is no hope of him! and she laid down, one after the other, a pile of unpaid bills, which greeted her eye upon his library-table, whither she went to search for a letter she was going to answer. Her heart was unusually heavy; for the consequences of his past imprudence were beginning now to threaten and disturb him. Creditors, who, for two years, had been obsequious, and even servile, began to be importunate and troublesome. Applications for money were much oftener made than answered; and Charles, teazed by these harrassing and degrading demands, became irritable and impatient; sometimes almost unkind in his deportment at home—abroad he was still the same, good-humoured, sprightly, and happy. Abroad, therefore, he was now generally to be found; and Matilda, dreading solitude, and trembling at the possibility of being found, at his return home, dissolved in tears (for what but tears could her solitary meditations supply?) compelled herself to accompany him in every proposal he had made for visiting or amusement. It was a painful, it was a revolting manner to her, of passing away her time; that time once so precious—once so improved by refined and enlightened intercourse—that time to be frittered away at theatres and assemblies, in unmeaning—ah! worse than unmeaning pursuits! it was a thought which it agonised her to dwell upon.

"But what can I do?" she repeated, and as she spoke she involuntarily raised her eyes to heaven.

"He is my husband! I would not forsake him—I would persuade him if I could—I am young—I am ignorant"—and the clasped hands and fast falling tears told how fervently she supplicated for better guidance than her own.

From this deep and painful abstraction she was recalled by hearing a knock at the hall-door, which seemed to announce a visitor, though it was yet rather an early hour for a call of ceremony; concluding, however, that it might be some one of her husband's numerous friends, who, on hearing he was not at home, would not come in, she was not alarmed as she would have been at such a signal, had she imagined it threatened her with being surprised by company, at a moment when she was in appearance and reality so unfit for it.

It was, therefore, with surprise and consternation, that she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, and tried to summon up a smile, when rapidly approaching steps, and the hasty opening of the library-door, informed her of the actual approach of she did not know whom, indeed, (for in her hurry to make the best of her appearance, she lost the name the servant pronounced) but, at any rate, of some one who would be astonished to find her with such vestiges of grief about her. But faint was the astonishment of the person who arrived, compared with hers, as her eyes rested upon a form, changed indeed since last she looked upon it, but still a dear and welcome form—for it was the form of St. Aubyn!

The pleasure which the first sight of him inspired, gave place in a moment to a pang the most agonising, as the idea "he comes to congratulate me as a

happy wife—and what—what does he find me!" struck upon her heart. Nevertheless, she called a smile upon her pallid countenance, and hastened to meet his extended hand.

"I find you well, I trust!" was his hesitating, anxious inquiry; and he tried to speak with firmness—he tried to compose his agitated features—but his hand trembled to an excess which compelled him to resign her's, almost without touching it; and he could not venture immediately to say more. Matilda on her part, was scarcely less embarrassed, though with different emotions. *Her* terror arose from the possibility, before so dear and confidential a friend, of being betrayed into a word that might implicate the misconduct of her husband, or her own unfortunate lot as the partner of his fate.

She hastened to turn his fixed attention from herself by inquiring after his mother: yet here she felt embarrassed. A consciousness of seeming to have neglected the duties of friendship, impeded the frank affectionate expressions she had been accustomed to use in speaking of her. Yet could she not, in justice to herself, forbear from attempting to exculpate her conduct.

"I fear Mrs. St. Aubyn must have misinterpreted —I fear I must seem to have been neglectful—" she began with hesitation to say, but St. Aubyn instantly interrupted her:

"You had other duties to fulfil, my dear Mrs. Harcourt," he said, in accents of tenderness, which forcibly recalled to Matilda how often, in former days, that gentle voice had soothed away every regret, which the thought of her fate and situation (rigid

from her earliest years) sometimes, though but rarely, excited. "Your time has now other and stronger claims upon it; and my dear mother, however she may regret the loss of your society, cannot be so unreasonable as to expect to retain it."

"But she has not quite forgotten me, I hope?" said Matilda, with tearful eyes. "She speaks of me sometimes?"—

"Oh frequently—very frequently.—Believe me, you share with me her fondest affections; and you know what those affections are!"

"Ah, how well!—how truly!"—said Matilda; "I shall not easily look upon her like again!" and at the thought of the many *many* happy days which, with this dear deserted friend, so much more than a mother to her, she had once passed—those days that never could return—her feelings could not be controlled. "That I could but see her!" she continued, as she buried her face in her handkerchief; "that I could but see her as often—it is a duty—but all my duties"—her voice died away, and extreme emotion rather than self-command, spared her the humiliation, and St. Aubyn the anguish, of hearing, that the duties which had hitherto constituted the employment of her life, a change of circumstances had occasioned her to abandon.

"Be comforted!" said he, again taking her hand, but with all the distance and respect due to their altered situation; "be assured, neither of us feel neglected by you—we both know your heart."—He spoke with a tenderness too affecting to chase away the sorrow he attempted to soothe—it was, indeed, in accents so tremulous and faint, as rather bespoke

one wanting himself the comfort he would have imparted.

Almost for the first time since he entered the room she raised her eyes to look at him. It was an involuntary action, inspired by the melancholy interest his mournful tone of voice excited. "Ah—you have been suffering,"—she said, as she marked in the glance of an instant, his altered countenance—his wasted form.

"I have had my trials," he replied; "but you," —he could not check the smile of fondness—he could not repress the name so dear—"Matilda, you have as yet, I hope, been exempt from the common lot—you are happy?"

"Oh the danger of this moment! oh spare me—save me from a word that may implicate my poor lost Charles!" was the instant thought that like electricity, darted through the mind of this truly virtuous young creature.

The supplication was too fervent not to be effectual. A sense of what she owed to herself and to her husband, enabled her to repel every betraying sigh—every treacherous tear—and to answer with as much firmness as her agitated spirits would allow, "I have the most affectionate husband in the world, and I have health; would it not be sinful, Mr. St. Aubyn, if I had not also a grateful heart? If it were permitted us to point out the path in which we could find happiness, I could have fancied, had it so pleased Providence, that a life of retirement, rather than in this great city, would have been more congenial to my habits and temper—but it was not so ordained, therefore it was doubtless, not desirable."

She had spoken, according to her simple judgment, for the best: she could sincerely say, "that she believed she had spoken the truth—from her heart." But she was speaking to one who had known her almost from her infant years—to one who had been her "companion, her guide, her own familiar friend;" and words however gentle, and looks however resigned, could not mislead him. Matilda, he saw, was yet beautiful; for on those exquisite features, so delicate and soft, nothing but beauty could dwell. But the elasticity of spirit, the calm but smiling happiness those features once pourtrayed, was totally gone. In the first anxious moment of viewing once more a face, to him, the loveliest and the dearest he had ever looked upon, in that instant glance he had detected the traces, not of momentary sorrow, but of fixed and deep anxiety.

Too sensitive, too much alive to every sentiment of propriety, not to feel, equally with herself, the extreme delicacy of her situation, he was desirous of seeming to put all the faith in the account she had just given of herself which she could possibly desire; and of encouraging the patient aspirations with which she concluded to speak.

"We are, indeed," said he, "but ill choosers for ourselves: how sweet, then, is the belief that our actions are guided by the great Governor of all things! The common and the unthinking mass retain their senseless language—"So it happened," and—"So it turned out!" But few are those who have observed and reflected upon their own destiny, or upon general events, who have not discovered that nothing *happens*—nothing *turns out!* all things, of

small or great importance, are but links in the great chain which connects the conduct of individuals with their fate, and their fate with God."

"If then, there be evil, and trials, in this world," he continued, after a short silence, "and that there are, I have not at this moment to seek," (Matilda's heart re-echoed this assertion) "there is comfort in the belief that they came not *accidentally*—they did not *happen* they were *sent*."

"But if our own mistakes have brought suffering upon us?" Matilda could not refrain from asking. As a child restored to the guidance and protection of a parent, her heart seemed to yearn after the counsels of her tutor and her friend, and while she listened to his voice, she gathered confidence and courage.

"It is still sent," replied St. Aubyn; "Oh Matilda!" he continued, fogetting, in the earnestness of his interest in her, that she was no longer his pupil—that years had intervened, and that the days—those happy days were gone, when to instruct and direct her docile mind had been, indeed, a work and labour of love, "Oh Matilda, without such a view of affliction, how could it be supported?—Without such a confidence in the end designed by sorrow, how could it be endured! and for what purpose would it be permitted? Has it no end—no meaning? Have all the works of heaven a plain and intelligible purpose—does design pervade whatever exists, and has calamity no intention but to torture? No, it is administered—it is bestowed; sometimes perhaps in the form of chastisement—sometimes as a warning; but in every form it emanates from heaven, and a virtuously disposed mind, by sanctifying it as the dispen-

sation of its Maker, converts it to its intended use, and renders it a blessing."

Matilda, almost with suspended breath, took in his words, as she would from the mouth of a ministering spirit of good. They spoke to her of more comfort than for many a profitless day her mind had received. She could have wished yet longer to have been thus abstracted; but St. Aubyn suddenly rose, with an effort which was quite apparent, and for a moment resumed an air of less interest and feeling. But when he approached to say farewel—when he attempted to add, "I will not fail to repeat to my mother your kind remembrance of her,"—his voice failed.

"Oh, carry to her my tenderest, warmest love!" Matilda with fervour exclaimed; "tell her all—all that is most kind and affectionate." She would have uttered more, but a burst of tears prevented her.

St. Aubyn lingered a few moments, unknowing what to do or say; then suddenly clasping her hand between his own in a tremulous grasp, "God bless you!—God bless you!" he fervently repeated—but no more—he was gone!

CHAPTER II.

CHARLES soon recovered the gaiety of which the loss of his son had, for a time, robbed him; and with his spirits, as might have been expected, returned his usual occupations and pleasures. He had, indeed, so far abided by his promises of reformation, as to gather together all his unpaid bills, and passed three mornings, or at least such a portion of them as was undisturbed by visitors, in trying to discover the amount of the demands which were made upon his fortune. But he found himself so much more involved than he expected, that, with his customary plan of postponing every thing, particularly what had a chance of proving unpleasant, he put off this very disagreeable examination, till he and Matilda were on their summer destination by the side of the sea, in a very retired, and consequently, cheap watering-place; such being, he assured her, his plan for the season which was now again fast approaching, it being already the latter end of May.

Things were, therefore, pretty well restored to their old state, excepting that Matilda, in his incorrigible thoughtlessness, found matter for apprehension, which oppressed her mind with a weight she could scarcely for a moment escape from. As far as ceaseless good-humour, and unremitting endeavours to discover what could make her smile and be

happy, or promote her pleasure and comfort, could proceed, he had certainly done his utmost. Hearing her repeatedly avow her perfect acquiescence in the dispensation which had disappointed her hopes in the loss of her son, and not comprehending the real source of her continual dejection, he began to shew symptoms of weariness at it; and, in occasional moments of irritation, threw out something like complaint of his possessing a dissatisfied and unhappy tempered wife. Such accusations were as yet too vague and indirect for Matilda to appropriate them to herself, unless she had been gifted with a disposition to cultivate disputes and arguments: a faculty of mind much valued and encouraged by some matrimonial people—upon what principle, it is not perhaps so easy to define.

But as she was naturally of a yielding and meek temper, preferring from her childhood, as it was very fortunate in her particular case she should do, to be accused unjustly, than to have to defend herself stoutly (the only sort of defence, generally speaking, that is of any service,) she never nourished the slight dissatisfaction of her husband into any definite or lasting sentiment, by opposing it with discussion. And though he was often vexed that she could not be gay, and enjoy society as he did, and when things went cross with him, as from the increasing embarrassment of his affairs, they now very did, he was sometimes irritated to use unkind expressions towards her, Charles still, upon the whole, estimated his wife as she deserved, and would have been inclined to exterminate from the face of the

earth, any human being who gave her half the anxiety he himself occasioned her.

The period for Epsom races was now approaching, a time when he was more than commonly animated and engaged; and Matilda, disliking bustle and noise, and heat, and dust, and clamour, and confusion of every sort, was, on her part, a degree or two more pensive and uncomfortable than she was wont to be. They had hitherto made a party to the races with their friends the Willetts; and it had become to be a sort of thing understood, that they were annually to unite in the same project. But latterly a degree of coolness had sprung up in the intimacy between them—how or when originated Matilda could not discover, though she had not much difficulty in believing it to arise from a sense of dissatisfaction on Mr. Willett's part, to the style of living her husband had adopted, and the utter inattention it betrayed to the counsels and opinion of his former guardian. Charles, on his side, had adopted, with the habits of his gay and young associates, most of their sentiments; and the latter, being universally of a kind to scout a thriving, straight-forward citizen, who drank no burgundy or champagne, and who wanted his dinner, at the latest, at five o'clock, it was not much to be wondered at, that he gradually came to consider the passing a day in Throgmorton-Street, to be little less than an infliction.

"I suppose we must ask the Willetts to go with us as usual to the races," said he one morning to Matilda, a few days before they were to take place.

"*If* we go, we certainly must; but I would much

rather stay at home; and really we have seen so little of the Willetts lately, that—I don't know—"

"The less the better," he exclaimed, interrupting her. "I do declare to you, Matty, that, whether it is that I am so accustomed to see those elegant girls, the Hunters, that I cannot bear any thing unfashionable; or whether it is, that Jane Willett does grow more *fal-de-ral* and foolish in her taste every day that she lives, I cannot tell; but I verily believe, if I thought there was a chance of my having to sit upon a barouche-box at Epsom races by the side of her green spencer and yellow bonnet, I could not go—I *could* not—and that is the truth."

"But how came you to fancy any thing about her green spencer and yellow bonnet? I have never seen her in any thing of the sort," said Matilda.

"O lord! *I* have! *I* have!" and he lifted up his hands and eyes as if the recollection inspired a kind of shuddering. "It was only yesterday morning, as I was walking down Cheapside, I thought I saw something on the other side of the way, simpering and smiling, and nodding, from under a Vesuvius kind of bonnet, all flame and fire. It can be nobody but Jane Willett, to be sure, I thought, and I began to bustle in a straight forward direction: for I thought of Epsom races directly, and I hoped I had escaped her; but, as the devil would have it, Tom Carlton met me before I had advanced three yards, and the street being clear she crossed over, and nailed us both for at least a quarter of an hour; and there she would have had us now, I believe, if I had not at last got away from her, by promising to call, and let her know all about our plans for the races;

at which, I suppose, all this green and yellow paraphernalia is to be let off."

"Charles, I cannot bear to hear you—I really cannot;" and Matilda spoke in such a tone of vexation, that he began to palliate as well as he could.

"But she really is so very tedious and tiresome, Matilda, and she does make such a tom-fool of herself in her dress?"

"She has her failings, perhaps; and if they do not exceed a mistake in the colour of a bonnet, they are of a very pardonable kind."

"Oh, excuse me! an error in dress is far from a pardonable error in a woman; and, now we are talking about that, Matilda, I have not been quite satisfied with your appearance of late. It is quite time that old bonnet and pelisse of yours were laid by, or given to your maid. You have associated with those tasteless girls, till you have insensibly adopted some of their Cheapside notions. I will get Bell Hunter to go with me to her milliner, in Albemarle-Street, and together we will find something fit for you to be seen in."

"My dear Charles, if you don't wish to vex me too much, pray don't talk so. I want nothing new; I have things by me now which you have given me, more than I can wear out in the next five years; it is necessary expenses that we must think of now."

"It is necessary that you should have a hat to put upon your head."

"It is—but it is not necessary that I should give five guineas for one, as Miss Hunter would give for me without hesitation. It is in vain, Charles, for us to trifle with our situation any longer; we *must* re-

trench, and that immediately. Now do, pray do, be persuaded."

"My dear girl, I tell you I will. The first moment I can arrange my plans for leaving town, I will; and when I am quiet and retired, I will look over every bill, and examine into every particular of my affairs."

"So you said last year, Charles, and then we were very much involved; and now we have the expenses of another year to add to our difficulties."

"Matilda, you really talk like a miser. One would think that money was the very idol of your life!" and he turned away in great irritation.

"You know that I do not deserve such an opinion, Charles," she said, as calmly as her extreme uneasiness would permit her. "I hold the love of money to be quite as contemptible a passion as you can possibly do. It is not money that I esteem; but I value respectability and consistency, neither of which can be maintained, when the general style of living is inadequate to the means of expenditure. It is very painful to me to have to bend my mind to these anxieties, not only because of their grovelling nature, as you consider it, but because I should be very glad to be free to dedicate it to thoughts much more consonant to my taste. But when I know what is hanging over us, what *must* sooner or later fall upon us, it would be strange indeed if I could divest my mind of uneasiness, especially when I see how inveterate and rooted is your abhorrence of the trouble you ought to take in regulating and looking into your affairs."

"Have I not said that I will take the very first

opportunity for doing this? And is it possible, whilst we are in this vortex of dissipation, that I can do so?"

"But why are we here? Why can we not immediately go into retirement? You have no occupation to detain you here."

He paused a little upon this, for it was rather too much to the purpose to be replied to without consideration. Fortunately, however, as he thought it, at that moment a knock at the hall door, in announcing a visitor, afforded him an opportunity of carelessly turning away from the inquiry, by saying, "Well, somebody is coming, we will talk more about this by and by."

The somebody that was coming was not exactly the person he expected, or would have been glad to see at that particular moment, for it was Mr. Willett who was announced, and who made his appearance with a countenance sufficiently grave to have aided with considerable effect, Matilda thought, the discussion his arrival had interrupted.

"So," said he, after he had shaken hands with her, and nodded to Charles, "many persons in this great city are ignorant it seems where your worship," turning to Charles, "has been pleased to establish your residence."

"I don't know exactly what you allude to, Sir," replied Charles.

"I allude to their troubling me with petitions which I suppose they would present to you, if they knew where to find you;" and he took from his pocket two or three letters. "This is from your tailor, I judge; and this—oh this, I suppose, is from your

wine merchant, urging me to urge you to have the extreme politeness to settle the enclosed, or they shall be driven to the necessity of adopting such measures, &c. as might not, I apprehend, be particularly agreeable to you."

"Very impertinent!—I wonder at their impudence."

"So do I; but in this free-born land, my good Charles, persons having waited, as they conceive, a sufficient time for what, in their untaught phraseology, they are accustomed to call 'their own,' are apt at last to grow somewhat importunate, or, as you call it, *impertinent*, in demanding it. And these good people having, in my administration of your affairs, been very punctually attended to, were, I suppose, in hopes that I possessed sufficient influence with you to prevail upon you to attend to what they had to say; and hence their impertinence, or whatever you term it, in addressing me."

"Well, Sir, they shall be attended to, I promise you; and now we will talk of something else. Matilda and I had just been speaking about the races; shall we have the pleasure of your company, and your daughters, to join us, as usual?"

"No, Sir," he replied, in a tone as severe as it was abrupt; "I should be sorry to be the cause of leading you into any additional expense, if it were only five shillings, at a time when every shilling is, or ought to be, an object of consideration to you."

"Sir, you are extremely obliging to give yourself so much solicitude,"—Charles was beginning to reply; but the old gentleman interrupted him with much warmth.

"I am not very obliging, Sir; I take no interest in your affairs for your own sake, for I believe you to be incorrigible: but I knew your father and I valued him, and I was always treated by him with respect and regard. I have known your wife too from a child, and I have loved her as if she had been one of my own daughters; and it is upon these considerations that I wish to make one more effort to save you from ruin."

"From ruin, Sir!—I really do not know what you mean!"

"No;" replied Mr. Willett, "how should you know, what you have never thought about for a single instant?"

"Upon my word, Sir, this really is going too far;" exclaimed Charles, irritated to the greatest degree, not more by the resolute defiance of Mr. Willett, than by feeling the truth of every word he uttered. "You forget that my minority is over."

"Charles, my dear Charles," said Matilda, stealing to his side, and taking his hand to enforce her intreaty, "do listen to Mr. Willett's advice."

"Leave the room, Matilda;" said he, hastily withdrawing his hand.—"Both of you together," he added, in a lower tone, "is more than my patience can endure."

She did not require the command to be repeated—her poor heart was full to the uttermost, and it was almost comfort to gain the solitude of her chamber, and pour out her sorrows in tears.

There was something in her fate, as it appeared to her in this moment of anguish, peculiarly wretched. The frivolity with which Charles repelled every

thing that was serious, was revolting enough to her thoughtful mind; but the style of his behaviour to a man of Mr. Willett's age—a man who, in the character of his guardian, had been also his benefactor, and the manner in which she had just heard him speak of his family, altogether it betrayed something so much like hardness of heart, that she began to tremble for her future peace, linked thus, in the earliest youth, with a man whose instability almost precluded a hope of his reformation.

"But I chose this lot for myself," she said aloud, as if to still the querulous murmurs which despair prompted, "and shall I not abide by it?"

Alas! if they were not the result of our mistakes, how small would be the benefit we should reap from our sorrows! But when we can trace unhappiness to its source, and detect the false step (as we very often can) that produced it, the moral lesson is complete; and, in a well-disposed mind, suffering is then sanctified not only by repentance, but by acquiescence in the decrees of that ruling Providence, whose justice may be read in the history of all His creatures. Matilda remained in her own apartment for some hours, not without a desire to return to Charles, whose momentary unkindness had not generated any disposition in her to retort it, by sullenness, or any other indication of resentment. Her tender nature felt all, and more than all the compassion he merited, when she thought of the degrading situation into which his heedlessness had brought him; and however, in a moment of extreme uneasiness, she might indulge some irritation against him, the very idea of being now almost his only friend, certainly the only

one who deserved in reality the appellation, for those who were formerly attached to him, his levity was daily alienating, this recollection served to restrain every angry emotion, and to excite that tenderness which is so inherent in the nature of a female, that, unless a man is bent upon exterminating it, by unremitting ill-treatment, it commonly surmounts and extinguishes every other sentiment.

She looked at her watch—it was almost the dinner hour. Mr. Willett had been gone some time, though his visit was a pretty long one. Not hearing Charles go out of his library, whither she knew he had retired after Mr. Willett left him, she encouraged a hope that the representations of his old friend had been effectual, and that he had been prevailed upon to dedicate this morning to looking over his accounts.

Her heart bounded with this hope, when, on answering a signal at her door, she perceived Charles himself standing at it, with a countenance which, before he spoke, clearly indicated tokens of penitence and reflection.

"My dear Matilda," said he, extending his hand to her, as soon as he entered the room, "I hope you have forgiven the insulting manner in which I spoke to you—indeed, love—" but he was not called upon to proceed; her affectionate heart more than accepted his apology.

"You could not offend me, Charles," said she; "I was only fearful of your hurting poor good Mr. Willett's feelings."

"Well, well," he replied, "I have pacified him; I have not only said—but done. I have been em-

ployed this whole morning as you would wish ; and, to be sure, the balance is frightfully against us. But don't be alarmed," he continued, observing her serious gaze, "we shall do very well. I have been talking to Mr. Willett—he thinks I must leave London. I believe I have no chance of doing much in the law.

"But little indeed!" Matilda thought, though she did not say it.

"I asked his advice about the church"—

"The church!" she repeated ; struck with horror at the bare idea of one (in her conception of the affair) so unfit for its sacred duties, rushing upon them, merely as a means of gain, which idleness unfitted him from pursuing in any other shape.

"But I really don't think I am altogether fit for the church," he continued.

"Then pray do not, for an instant, turn your thoughts that way, Charles. Surely, if we retire from London, and go to reside upon one of your farms—"

"My farms, my dear girl! I know not if I shall be able to call them mine much longer. It is of no use to deceive you, you know, Matilda."

"Oh no: don't deceive me, Charles: neither deceive me nor yourself. All that we have to dread is in self-deception ; in knowing the worst, alone, is safety."

"Then we shall soon know the worst," he replied. "I have, in the course of this morning, made great progress in ascertaining that ; but as it is a disagreekind of employment, you must allow me a little interval, Matty. I will resume it again to-morrow

but now let us go and get a good dinner, if we can; it will give me strength to proced."

She only replied with a sigh. "Nothing but absolute misery will suffice to make him serious for half an hour together," was the mental interpretation she put upon the circumstances of the morning, as she accompanied him to the dining-room.

CHAPTER III.

CHARLES really did perform his promise, and dedicated the whole of the two succeeding days to the purpose of ascertaining the situation of his pecuniary affairs. The result of the whole was much worse than he himself had expected, and pretty much what Matilda and Mr. Willett had anticipated; very nearly the whole of his fortune would be exhausted were he to do what justice required, and liquidate all his debts. This measure she very strenuously urged, and he promised to adopt it; but the interval between promising and performing is often a very dangerous one, and so it proved to Charles, who, in having recourse to other advice than that of his wife and his former guardian, found it desirable to pursue different means from what they recommended for extricating him from his difficulties. The person whose counsels he sought in his present emergency was a Mr. Hunter, the father of the young ladies whose fashion and elegance he so particularly

admired. Mr. Hunter had been engaged in money transactions all his life; in fact, he got his livelihood by a profession, for which it would be difficult to discover an appropriate name; but the technical term which signifies it, is, we believe, a money scrivener. Between this gentleman and Charles a great alliance had been struck, cemented by the similarity of their taste for pleasure and amusement; but principally strengthened by the sedulous endeavours of Mr. Hunter to retain in bonds of the strictest amity a young man whose disposition and habits rendered him such a particularly desirable person for one of his occupation to be connected with. The very first transaction which made him acquainted with Charles, so fully unfolded the character he had to deal with, as to induce him to keep an eye upon him in his progress to ruin; naturally desirous of securing to himself a share in the property, which, judging from the usual symptoms, was likely to become the prey of those, who, like himself, lived by the imprudence or misfortunes of their fellow creatures. This transaction originated in Mr. Harcourt's having been *unfortunate* (as it is called) at Newmarket, previous to his marriage; and not being able to relieve himself from his difficulties without the knowledge of his guardian, he considered himself exceedingly lucky when a friend offered to introduce him to Mr. Hunter, as a gentleman who, upon the most honourable terms, would be extremely happy to lend him his assistance.

These honourable terms were proposed and acceded to, and every thing settled in the most polite manner possible on both sides. Mr. Hunter was all

careless suavity, quite unaccustomed to pursue these matters but as a means of accomodation to his particular friends. Charles was the most obliged of all human beings; and Mr. Hunter, in parting, preferred a request to see Mr. Harcourt when he came to town, in Half-moon Street, where he should be happy to introduce him to his family.

At this juncture, however, Charles being engaged in settling with his guardian upon his coming of age, and furnishing a house, and marrying, had not availed himself of Mr. Hunter's politeness, and in fact, saw him no more till he waited upon him after his marriage, to discharge the debt he had incurred with him, which, little as he had thought about it, he found to be sufficiently heavy when the time arrived for paying it. But not doubting that as it was the first, it would infallibly be the last embarrassment of that sort he should have to repent, he closed his account with Mr. Hunter, supposing it would have been the finale of every thing between them.

But Mr. Hunter, with more years, had also more sagacity than Charles, and far from considering their acquaintance as ended, it seemed to him to be but just begun. He introduced him to his daughters, two very fashionable and handsome young women, whom it was scarcely possible for him to spend an hour with, without having an invitation to come again; and then remembering his wife at home, Charles could not avoid to say he should be very happy to introduce her to them. In short, he was pleased with the whole family, and soon discovering that they were acquainted with many persons whom he knew and visited, an intercourse was not long in being es-

tablished between them. An intercourse which had now insensibly grown into an intimacy, much more congenial to the disposition of Charles than to that of Matilda, who in the character of the Miss Hunters detected much that she disapproved, and in the father's a great deal that she detested. But she was passive to a fault; and perceiving it to be her husband's pleasure to associate with this family, she had been contented to resign, for the sake of promoting that pleasure in him, the society of many persons much better approved of by her heart and her understanding. "It was something," she thought "though but little gained, to preserve him from the still more dangerous company than even the Hunters, of those dissipated and idle young men, who, once she knew, and she feared they had much oftener than she knew, seduced him to the gaming table—a place of all others that of which she reasonably entertained the greatest horror. It was not despair, it was conviction, which, after more than two years of trial, compelled her often to assure herself that her wedded lot *was* to be one of unhappiness; and that nothing but submission on her side could preserve it from becoming also one of degrading altercation and perpetual discord.

To submit therefore was her daily struggle; for seldom indeed was there a day in which this resignation, not only of her will but of her judgment, was not called upon to exercise itself, less by the perverseness than the indiscretion of her husband. But, habitual as it was become to her to yield her own opinion to his, she could not hear of the project he had been prevailed upon by Mr. Hunter to adopt for

paying his debts, without doing her utmost to dissuade him from it.

"Let us part with every thing we possess, Charles," she said; "and upon the fortune which is settled upon me let us retire, and try to live as well as we can, rather than involve yourself in such certain ruin as must follow the borrowing money upon these exorbitant terms. You *must* pay it some time or other, and then what is to become of us?"

"But I am going to retrench—I am going to save money for the purpose of paying it; in short, Matilda, Hunter has fully convinced me that I am right, and in fact the thing is—all but—I believe it is done." He could not make the acknowledgment without some confusion, for he felt how unjustly he had behaved towards the faithful and affectionate counsellor then before him, not only in acting contrary to her advice, but in making a mockery of her opinion, by asking it when he confessed it was too late to follow it. She had never, since her marriage, been more hurt, or more angry with him; but she restrained as much as possible the expression of her emotions; she only said, "In that case, it was not worth while to ask me any opinion about it;" and for fear she should be impelled to utter more, she hastened from the room.

Thus for the present, his affairs being rather patched up than mended, and Charles delivered from immediate embarrassment, it was, Matilda expected, a thing next to impossible that he could remain in London at the time of Epsom races without appearing there.

It was not merely the images of dust, and heat,

and noise, and every thing that was most in discordance with her own quiet temperament, that made her sicken at the thought of having this annual martyrdom of nerves inflicted upon her; it was the recollection of the enthusiasm with which Charles entered into the sport that was going forward, and the fate which, as an enthusiast, pretty generally followed him of playing a losing game.

But as the day previous to the races arrived, and she heard nothing of the usual project of a barouche and four horses, the charm of driving which, appeared to him a sort of elysium, and usually furnished a subject to reckon upon for a week beforehand, she hoped that his late ruminations had really produced some benefit; and, in expelling from his thoughts a little of their frivolity, had induced him to forego for the present all imprudent and unecessary expenses.

He had even kept himself at home every evening to the number of three, since he had been employed in ascertaining the state of his affairs; he had remarked once or twice to her, that he believed he could make himself very happy always to pass his time in this quiet, domestic manner; and, not till the afternoon of the fourth day, had he betrayed any symptoms of weariness at such an unchanging state of repose. Then, after dinner, he first began to exhibit slight aspirations after something different; and Matilda, indulgent and considerate, though somewhat disappointed to find how very short-lived were his domestic pleasures, could not find it in her heart to answer with coldness or repugnance to his wish, that she would accompany him to visit the Hunters.

"But don't let us stop to supper, Charles," she said, as with a willing air, but a sinking heart, she was leaving him to go and equip herself for the walk.

"Oh, no—certainly not," he replied, "we will merely spend a quiet hour or two, and home again. That is, after all, the most agreeable kind of visiting; that is the style I shall adopt for the future."

Matilda was obliged to turn away her head to conceal a smile, which she would not upon any consideration that he should have seen; for though the idea of Charles visiting in London, "in a quiet manner, just to spend a rational hour or two, and home again," was a thought that would have provoked a laugh if she had dared to indulge it, she would have grieved, by the faintest indication, to betray any incredulity of an alteration in his habits, so very much apropos to every thing she could wish.

When she had quite composed her countenance, she replied to his remark, "I am very glad to hear you say so; it is the only sort of visiting that ever did or ever can give me pleasure."

"But you must procure a different set of associates," she thought, as she tied on her hat; "not such persons as those we are now going to visit. Rational hours, according to my conception of them, are not to be enjoyed in that circle."

"I am ready, Charles," said she, as she returned to the room.

He looked at her a few moments without speaking, and with a smile, but with an expression which she fancied implied something of disapprobation of her dress.

"Do you see any thing about me that you do not like?" she inquired.

"No, no—you are very neatly—very nicely dressed. You always are—but—"

"But what, my dear Charles?"

"The Hunters, you know, are always so very fashionable—so very much dressed."

"Well, then, I will go and make myself a little smarter; only I thought, as there would be only ourselves, and perhaps we might not find them at home—"

"Oh yes, we shall. Did I not tell you I saw Mr. Hunter this morning, and he asked me to bring you this evening?"

"No, you said nothing about it."

"Then it escaped my memory to mention it. But go, love, and furbelow yourself out a little; we may meet two or three people; I don't know that we shall, though."

When Matilda, according to his desire, had *furbelowed* herself out, as he called it, she once more descended to the dining-room, and there she found him in his full visiting costume; a coach was called, and coming by degrees to the right reading of the affair, she began to understand that they were going to meet an arranged party: a circumstance of which Charles, from motives she could very well comprehend, had not chosen to inform her.

But to obviate any necessity for measures of this kind for the future, she said to him, just before the coach stopped at Mr. Hunter's door, "if you had told me, Charles, exactly how the case was, and that were going by invitation, and were to meet a party,

I should not have the less willing to accompany you, if you had desired it."

"You are very good—very kind," he replied, in some slight confusion; "I thought perhaps this confounded business of the last few days—but, however, I am rejoiced to find it does not dwell upon your mind. Why should it?—hang care, say I."

In this apostrophe she could not join. Care had seldom sat so heavily upon her heart as at the present instant. This trifling incident had discomposed her more than almost the whole imprudence of Charles; for while he was indiscreet, he was still, she always thought, one of the most ingenuous of human beings; and it was upon his candour she rested all her hopes of his being preserved from the dishonourable conduct, which pecuniary difficulties too often produce.

Slight as had been his deviation from uprightness, in inveigling her into company at a time when her spirits (and his own, if he had possessed any reflection) rendered it any thing but a recreation, she marked it with sorrow as the beginning of crooked policy, and mysterious dealing; and with more than her accustomed pensiveness of features, she appeared amongst the gay group assembled in Mr. Hunter's drawing-room.

CHAPTER IV.

The vivacity of Charles, which had slumbered for nearly a week, revived at once, and he was ready to return with an animated smile the cordial greeting of a very handsome girl, who was engaged in deep discourse with a gentleman, and standing near the door at which they entered.

"Oh, Charles Harcourt!—the very person we wanted!" she exclaimed. "Ah! how d'ye do?" she added, with less sprightliness, but perfect good humour, to Matilda. "Do you know, Charles," she continued, "that Walton and I are laying the most enchanting scheme: you must lend us your assistance."

"You have only to name wherein it can be useful."

"You must know then—but come here—Arabella must be admitted into our council. You won't be jealous, Mrs. Harcourt, if I take him away for a little while?" and she nodded to Matilda, who had no other objection to parting with Charles, than a reluctance to being left alone in a circle, which, at Mr. Hunter's, usually comprised every kind and sort of oddity that in such a place as London may be collected together. With the most shrinking timidity she stole to a seat: for to wait for the chance of either of the Misses Hunter coming to aid and coun-

tenance her with their notice, was to wait, she knew, till they had said all they had to say to every gentleman in the room; and Mr. Hunter's civilities being at present engaged, by his being disposed of at a whist table, she had nothing to do but to take a chair, and as it was her disposition to make the best of every thing, and extract from every circumstance what good it afforded, she was willing to approve, by the most polite attention to it, the discourse with which she was favoured by a gentleman, near whom she accidentally placed herself.

"You have heard ma'am, I suppose," said he, "the scheme which is in agitation?"

She replied in the negative.

"Indeed! I am perfectly surprised! I should have expected they would have endeavoured to prevail upon you to take the part of Desdemona."

Her looks seemed to implore him to be more explicit; and he proceeded.

"The Miss Hunters are intent upon getting up an amateur play; and we are assembled to night, I believe, for the purpose of casting the parts, or I should more properly express myself by calling it *catching* the parts—inasmuch as we are all so greedy of procuring the best, that I fear, while the inferior *dramatis personæ* will stand a chance of getting no owners at all, there will be such contention for the characters of Othello, Michael Cassio, and Iago, that we shall have the squabbling of Cassio rehearsed here before he appears on the stage."

"But what are they to do for a theatre?" inquired Matilda.

"Oh, ma'am, you do not imagine that, in such a

nursery for the arts as this great city, we are unprovided with a cradle in which to rock the infant genius of the sons and daughters of the drama? Oh no, ma'am—we have many private theatres in different parts of the town, consecrated to the first essays of amateurs, who *wish to feel their way* to the Temple of Fame. At the theatre in —— Street some of the present party are to be made immortal."

"But is Othello the play they have fixed upon?" said she, half sighing as she thought of the probable massacre of that master-piece of the drama. "That is a bold essay for amateur acting, is it not?"

"Bold, madam! pardon me if I endeavour to set you right. Nothing is bold at the present day. Formerly, indeed, persons studied, and practised, and consecrated a great portion of their time to understand the subjects they meddled with—but we have altered all that; we do every thing by *a coup de main*. We have no studying, no perplexing our brains now. We take the bull by the horns. If we want to be literary, if we want to be dramatic, if we want to be musical, if we want to be critical (and we all want to be something or other,) there are now short cuts to all and every thing. For instance, I want to be critical, like my friend Tom Layton there; you know Tom Layton, ma'am?"

"No, sir, I am not so happy."

"Not so unhappy, ma'am, you should say, if you have ever been tempted to immortalise yourself in a literary way."

"I never have, sir, I can assure you," she replied with a smile.

"I dare say not, ma'am. You are too young for

any such resources. You have yet some years, before you will be driven either upon literature or devotion, the usual shelter of women who outlive their youth and beauty."

"And very excellent shelter too," said Matilda.

"Very, indeed, ma'am; I recommend either to their notice in preference to wine or spirituous liquors."

Matilda knew not whether to laugh or be angry; but though he was to her imagination *frightfully* satirical, it was the less intimidating alternative to remain exposed to his attacks (for such they seemed to her,) than to quit her seat, and draw any eyes upon her by walking across the room to another.

"I am afraid you are at the least as severe as your friend—I forget his name," she said, in reply to his last remark.

"Not at all, ma'am. I am the most timid and gentle of creatures. I could not have the heart to act by any lady as Tom does."

He paused; and Matilda feeling herself called upon to inquire into the delinquencies of "*Tom*," begged to know wherein he was so cruel.

"He murders them, ma'am—mangles them—cuts them into four quarters"—and he affected a most piteous look and tone.

"In a critical capacity I suppose you mean?" said Matilda.

"In his critical *character*, ma'am; *capacity* we never say any thing about. If persons only pursued the employment for which they had a capacity, we should not be so fertile in the arts and sciences as, heaven be praised, we are! The walls at Somerset

House would not be so well filled; nor the columns dedicated to the announcement of works in the newspapers; neither would the pastry cooks and trunk-makers be the better, as they always are, twelve times a year, for a clever production of my friend Tom's."

"If that is the manner in which his production is disposed of, I should imagine he himself is not much the better for it," said Matilda.

"Oh, yes; he gets into print for nothing, which he could not do without it: and he gets twenty pounds a year, which he could not get in any other way; and he gets an opportunity of talking about duchesses and milliners, and King Pepin and Callimachus, and Clementi and Kozeluch, and governesses and housemaids, and countesses and cooks, and much of the like twaddle. To be able to chatter is something; I am rather fond of it myself."

Matilda could not refrain from a smile, which her new friend remarking—"I am afraid you doubt me," said he; "I am afraid you have formed a low estimate of my talents in the talking line."

"Not in the least, Sir; I have seldom indeed met with"—she paused, and again smiled.

"You have seldom met with so agreeable a person; that, I have no doubt, was what you were going to say. Thank you, ma'am—we really ought to know each other better—let me see"—and he looked round.

Matilda involuntarily turned her head in the direction he was looking.

"I was turning to look about me," said he, "in hopes of discerning a common friend to introduce us

to each other. Oh, here is Miss Hunter. My dear Miss Hunter," and he arrested her hasty progress by him, "just one moment—do be so good as to ——"

"To do what?—name it in a moment, for I am in a hurry," she replied.

"Merely to introduce this lady and me to each other."

"You have been talking together for the last half hour, and now you want an introduction?"

"I have been talking,"—he replied—"the lady could not talk, according to the etiquette of England, till she knew who she was talking to. I assure you I have merely ground a few words out of her, as one would out of a mill. But if you will merely pronounce our several names"—

"This then is Mrs. Harcourt—and Mrs. Harcourt this is Mr. Danvers; and if he makes himself but half as disagreeable to you, as he does to me, you will be very sorry you ever heard his name."

"Ah, cruel!"—he replied—"when you know that the study of my life is, to *recommend* myself, as Lord Chesterfield would say, to the fair sex."

"I know nothing at all about your studies, except by their result, and that is the consummation of every thing that is unpleasant—satire, and spleen, and—oh, you are a very horrid person!" and she was hurrying off, but returning with an air and countenance which proclaimed, however in contradiction to her words, that Mr. Danvers was of consequence enough in her estimation to be taken into her schemes, whatever they might be.

"Oh, we have been so diverted!" said she; "here has been Walton and Edward Harley"

"Iago and Othello you should say," interrupted Mr. Danvers.

"That is the merriment of the thing!" she replied. "Walton is very desirous of playing Othello, because it is the more interesting character of the two; but then he does not like to be *black*, because of his beauty. The great point you know with him, in acting at all, is to shew off his person."

"Then surely he might have made a more happy choice in a character," observed Matilda.

"But let Othello be a white man for once," said Mr. Danvers: "it can be put in the play-bills, you know, 'Othello, by particular desire, will be done white.' Some may like him best white. I will go and propose it;" and he half rose, but Miss Hunter compelled him to sit still.

"I will not have you go near them," said she. "Silly as they are, they will very easily discover that you are laughing at them, and then they will throw up the whole thing altogether. If you will but be contented to laugh to yourself, I don't care how much you indulge."

"Laugh!" he replied with extreme gravity, "of what materials do you imagine me to be composed, to laugh at the tragedy of Othello? You do injustice to my feelings, Miss Hunter;" and he spread his hand upon his heart with the utmost solemnity.

At this juncture the youngest Miss Hunter, accompanied by Charles, approached them.

"Well, Jane," said the former, "we have arrang-

ed it all. Walton *is* to be Othello, and Edward takes Iago. I want Charles Harcourt to play Cassio."

"Oh pray, Charles don't," exclaimed Matilda, in agony at the idea of his being joined in any scheme so very likely to turn out ridiculously.

"Matilda!" said he in a tone scarcely exceeding a whisper; but it was a tone which she understood to forbid her interference, and though miserable at the thought of his being involved in such a project, she said no more. She rejoiced as Miss Arabella proceeded.

"But Charles thinks he can serve us best in the office of prompter, so I have made William Escott take Cassio."

"And have you reserved nothing for yourself?" inquired Mr. Danvers; "perhaps the gentle Desdemona?"

"No, we are better provided," she replied; "William knows all the people at both the great theatres, and he can get a Desdemona from either of them."

"And Emilia into the bargain," said Miss Hunter; "and all the minor characters we want we can have either there or at the Coburg, or any of those places; William can manage all that. So now, that being settled," she continued, "let us make a loo table. Charles, it is a great while since I won any money of you; I shall want some for Epsom races to morrow. Oh, by the way, how do you go there this year?"

"I had not thought much about going at all," he replied.

"Not thought about going!" she repeated: "Not thought about going to the races!"

"Why, Matilda is not very fond of that sort of thing," he replied; half ashamed to take upon himself the whole discredit of being indifferent to so grand a business as Epsom races.

"I don't know what one is fond of in this world," said Miss Arabella, flinging herself into a chair.

"That is a most cruel remark of yours," observed Mr. Danvers: "I was in hopes you knew to a certainty how very fond you are of me."

"No, I never feel sufficiently convinced of the state of my affections respecting you, they fluctuate so very much. I like you exceedingly when you do any thing that is agreeable or useful. I shall be very fond of you, for instance, if you will do the handsome thing by us to-morrow, and come up to the door with a charming set out—barouche—four horses —Newman's very best you know."

"And take you off to Gretna Green?" he inquired.

"Gretna Green indeed!—no, there is no occasion to go there; I would rather be married in a steady way at St. James's Church. There is less expense, and absurdity to be repented of at the year's end, when one begins the work of contrition."

"Very true!" he replied, "that we may not swell the account of repentance, then, suppose, instead of four horses and a barouche, we have a chaise and pair; they will carry us very well to St. James's Church."

"I dare say they would; but I don't at present desire you to carry me to St. James's Church: I want to go to a much more agreeable place. I want to go to Epsom races, and—"

Miss Hunter here interrupted the negociation her sister was carrying on, by summoning her, with the rest of the party, to the loo-table she had been arranging.

Matilda, by the desire of her husband, joined the party, though with a dissatisfaction she found it difficult to disguise: for her natural dislike of cards was at present augmented by her abhorrence of the spirit of gambling, which made the use of them at Mr. Hunter's, in her opinion, any thing but an amusement.

In spite of herself, however, she was a little entertained with the character of Mr. Danvers, which she fancied unfolded itself in some degree in the skilful defence he made against the continued attacks of the youngest Miss Hunter; who, with what Matilda, in her simple judgment, knew not to call by any other name than that of effrontery, persevered in her efforts to draw him into a promise of escorting her and her sister on the following day to the races.

"Well, I see there is nothing to be got out of you," said she at last; "however I was willing to try, that I might have nothing to reproach myself with. So, Jane, you shall go in the tilbury with my father—I had rather stay at home, I am sure, than go *tête-à-tête* with him," and she laughed.

"But why should you stay at home," said the good-natured, thoughtless Charles, "Matilda will like to go.

"I would rather not, indeed," said she; but pausing, and almost feeling in her gentle nature, as she said this, that she was interfering too austerely to

prevent pleasure, she added, "but *my* staying at home is of no consequence; don't let *me* be thought of, either one way or the other."

Every thing was arranged in less than two minutes, Charles was sure the morning would be so fine, Matilda would be delighted to go; and, finally, the Miss Hunters might depend upon seeing him at their door, in the desired barouche, at the proper time.

This was a dégree of complaisance to which Matilda, well as she knew his improvidence, could scarcely have imagined, at the present moment, he would have suffered himself so very foolishly to be betrayed. The utmost she prepared herself to hear him propose for the benefit of the Miss Hunters, was to take the forlorn one, who would have been left at home by the obduracy of Mr. Danvers, and give her a place in his tilbury. But Charles, conceiving his fortune to be in that desperate state, which hardly admits of being made worse, was now, like many others, upon the brink of ruin, ready to do any thing that was most unadvisable and absurd; and if Miss Arabella Hunter had hinted a wish for the equipage of six horses, he would hardly have refrained from gratifying it.

Angry with his inconsistency, and angry with what had always appeared to her something worse than the frivolity of those to whom he was making these sacrifices, Matilda could have cried with the utmost satisfaction; indeed, it was with some difficulty she restrained her tears, such a variety of unpleasant emotions contended for predominance. They were none of them exchanged for more pleasing

ones by the arrival of Mr. Hunter, who, just released from his rubber, came up to pay his respects to her.

"Mrs. Harcourt at the card-table!" he exclaimed, as he approached her, "this is quite an alteration. If I might presume to say so," he continued with a slight bend of his head, "I should call it a *reformation*."

"We attach different ideas to the word reformation, I perceive," replied Matilda.

"Matilda, my dear girl, don't preach us a sermon," said Charles; an entreaty which caused a general laugh.

"I wish Mrs. Harcourt would be so good, I am sure," observed the youngest Miss Hunter, "I think I *could* attend to a sermon that was delivered over the card-table; the novelty of the thing, and the force of contrast, would render it impressive."

"Well, I think I will take my chance amongst you," said Mr. Hunter, offering to place himself at the table.

"Oh, papa, I can't have you here;" and, "there is no room for you here;" were the respective greetings of his daughters, as he made this overture.

Matilda, inexpressibly delighted to make her escape, readily offered her seat to him; which, after many fruitless intreaties that she would continue to join the party, he at last accepted.

Though less addicted than most persons to indulge in that kind of observation upon her fellow-creatures which prompts something of the reflection of the Pharisee, a thankful ejaculation, "that we are not as other men are," she could not remark the agi-

tation which high play elicited from most of the party, without a grateful emotion at having been preserved from pursuits so contaminating to taste, and, as she thought them to morality. Nothing that was congenial to good feeling or sound sentiment, could she extract from any thing that was going on; but much that was revolting to both.

The sordid selfishness of Mr. Hunter's character, however concealed under an appearance of carelessness, was still too palpably visible to any one keenly observing him, as she was now, not to excite feelings of the strongest disgust.

"To see the father of daughters like these young women," she thought, "handsome and clever, for so they undoubtedly are—to see him encouraging every thing that is wrong in them—the spirit of gaming, by joining in it—the spirit of coquetry, by laughing as loud as any of these thoughtless young men about them, at their levity and nonsense—to see all this, and countenance it—what can his mind be made of? And Charles, too, how can he seem so amused?"

Alas! poor Matilda, so long his constant companion—so long a sufferer from his stubborn levity, and still to ask this question! Still to make it a matter of surprise that the mind which *must* be amused, which *must* be taken away from itself, will fly to any thing and any body, no matter how frivolous, how foolish, how erring, and often how sinful, if it be but a shelter from solitude and reflection.

The presence of Mr. Hunter at the card-table, far from being any restraint upon high play, seemed to be the signal for the removal of all regard to prudence.

"What, is is possible Charles Harcourt," said he, "that you can have been wasting your understanding upon loo, performed with counters? Here, Bell, take them away. If I condescend to come among you, I have nothing to do with so much per dozen. Good Lord! any body would thing you were selling buttons at Exeter Change."

The young men were unanimous in approving this change of measures; but Mr. Danvers, who, though far from an old, or even an elderly man; was still not young enough to consider the loss of money as amply repaid by the smiles of the Miss Hunters, soon followed Matilda's example, saying, as he rose from his chair;

"Mrs. Harcourt wishes me to take that seat by her. We were getting extremely agreeable when the cards interrupted us; so, with your permission," bending with much gravity to Miss Hunter, "I will resume my delightfulness."

"You may resume any thing you like," said she, "so long as you don't resume your place here; for I have been tired to death of you this last hour and a-half."

"Jane has made no money of you, I doubt, Danvers," said Mr. Hunter.

"But she has made a conquest of my heart, and that's more precious than gold," he replied—

"Who steals my purse steals trash."

"Eh, Mr. Othello?" and he turned to a gentleman who had long been deeply engaged in the mysteries of the game; and who had only occasion to tes-

tify half as much devotion for the peerless Desdemona as he did for the knave of clubs, to perform his part of a lover to admiration.

"If that is to be Othello," thought Matilda, as she fixed her eyes upon a round curly head, very thick, apparently, and a face which the owner of it, surveying it in a glass with the complacency a glass always conveys to the features it reflects, might possibly consider handsome, but which carried in every lineament of it, as it seemed to her, defiance and proof against any thing like expression or variation; "if that is to be Othello, it does not much signify about his being black."

"Is that gentleman to perform Othello," she inquired of Mr. Danvers, as he again took his place by her.

"Yes, ma'am; are you not ready to wish, with Desdemona, that "Heaven had made you such a man?"

"I am at present too little acquainted with his merits," and she smiled.

"Too little acquainted with his merits!" and you have been in company with him two hours! Had two hours study of his face, and his well curled head, and his cravat, and yet say, you are unacquainted with his merits!"

"But you remember that I must see Othello's visage in his mind," she replied, "before I can justly say with Desdemona, I wish that Heaven had made me such a man."

"True! and then I am afraid you will utter no such wish."

"But as I am already provided with a husband,"

she replied, "it will be as well perhaps that I should not."

Mr. Danvers, who appeared to have a taste for paradox, began to argue the point with her, after a manner which, though entertaining enough to a mind sufficiently disengaged from other thoughts to be able to attend to it, was rather bewildering to her comprehension, fixed as her attention was upon Charles, who was losing his money, she perceived, in a very magnificent manner.

The table at length breaking up, he called upon her to lend him her purse, the whole contents of which she perceived were insufficient to defray his losses.

But in spite of his ill-luck, his gaiety did not forsake him; he was the life of them all, laughing with the Miss Hunters, and making bets with their father upon the event of the different races on the following day, and in the intervals between this important business, arranging with the performers the particulars respecting the representation of Othello, which was to take place in the course of a fortnight or three weeks. Not a cloud came over his face till he took his leave, and found himself *tete-a-tete* with Matilda on his return home. Then flinging himself back in one corner of the coach, "how devilish unlucky I always am at cards!" said he.

"What a pity it is then, that you should tempt ill fortune!" replied Matilda.

"Oh! for God's sake don't let us have any lectures; I am not in a humour to bear them," he exclaimed.

Matilda said no more. She only felt very glad

that it was dark enough for her tears to escape observation.

She could guess what he must be feeling; and she did not wish to irritate him still more by letting him see the pain he had given her.

CHAPTER V.

The following morning brought with it the circumstances usually attending her husband's engagements at sporting amusements; and Matilda had to endure the pain of seeing Charles during breakfast, arranging his various bets of the preceding evening in a book with a precision which would have done him credit had it been employed in balancing his debts with the means of discharging them.

Advice she knew was fruitless—she had tried it to the utmost of her skill; and resistance to his measures was a desperate effort to a young woman whose whole life had been passed in such a series of submissive acts, that to oppose the will of another, especially the will of one to whom she conceived herself to owe such unqualified obedience, required a degree of fortitude which nothing but one principle could suffice to call into action. That principle, however, now was roused. That principle of duty by which she strove to regulate all her actions, enabled her, when the devotions of the morning had calmed the doubts and indecision of her sleepless night, to descend to the breakfast room with a mild but fixed

determination to decline accompanying the proposed party to the races; and thus, as far as *she* could, to discountenance, if she could not dissuade her husband from a scheme, in his present circumstances so improper and so imprudent. But such was the timidity of her nature, that although internally thus fortified by a strong consciousness of rectitude, she felt so tremulous and nervous in having to announce any resolution of her own, that for some minutes after she entered the room she suffered Charles to pursue his occupation, uninterrupted by a single word that threatened to interfere with it.

She was yet musing upon the best method of addressing him, when the servant entered with a letter, which he presented to her.

It was as follows:

My dear Matilda:

I hope to goodness you will not be set off for Epsom races when this reaches you, for if you are, I cannot think what I shall do. Would you believe it, nothing ever was so unlucky! Here is Emily and Fanny and Edward all fallen ill together with the measles; and, to mend the matter, the two nursemaids are so insolent as to say they are quite worn out with sitting up; and the children are so fractious, nobody can do any thing with them. I am in a state of the greatest misery you can possibly conceive. Pray come to me without delay. I have sent John with the poney-chaise, Mr. Belgrave wanting the carriage for the races. But pray, my dear Matilda, don't lose a moment, as I have very particular

reasons for wishing to see you as soon as possible, which I will explain when we meet.

"Ever your most affectionate mother,

"M. BELGRAVE."

"Pray come directly."

If, instead of conveying this dismal intelligence, Mrs. Belgrave's epistle had communicated the most joyful tidings, it could not have been more thankfully received by Matilda, who with justifiable policy determined upon making it the plea for enforcing her previous resolution of not joining in the proposed excursion.

"What's the matter?" said Charles, closing his book, after a careful revision of what he had been noting down in it, and putting it in his pocket with as much satisfaction as if it had brought him already the bank-notes it probably would be the means of conveying from him. "What's the matter now?" he repeated.

Matilda only answered by placing her mother's letter in his hands; which having read, he threw down with some vehemence on the table, remarking as he did so.

"That's capital! How well I could have guessed that to be your mother's if I had not seen her name to it. Well, just write her a line, with your compliments—very much obliged to her, but you are particularly engaged."

"There is no occasion for that," replied Matilda, mildly; "because as I am not particularly engaged, I mean to obey her summons."

"Not particularly engaged!—why do you not re-

member, Matilda, what we agreed upon last night? or have you slept away your senses, child?"

He looked earnestly upon her face as he spoke. There was something in its pale pensiveness which reproached him, and he thought he might with more justice have asked, "have you *wept* them away?"

But reflection was at all times what he the most detested, and reflection at the present moment was perfectly insupportable; so, with his usual method of dismissing it, he began to hum a theatrical song; and having in the interval of a few seconds chased it pretty well off, "Now, Matty," he continued, "don't be ridiculous—there's a good girl; you can't be sulky and ill-natured if you try for it ever so—you know you can't; so write the old lady a civil negative, and then be as good humoured as it is in your nature to be, and let us be off to the races. Oh, such a set-out we shall have! I have been down to Newman's about it. Egad, I was but *just* in time. Those four lovely greys were *as near* being had off by that stupid Walton—and precious work he would have made with them! But I can talk about that another time—now to breakfast—we have not a minute to lose"—and he took out his watch with one hand, whilst with the other he seized upon the tea-kettle.

"I *cannot* go with you, Charles," said Matilda, still speaking gently, but with a firmness which surprised him to a degree that arrested him in his progress, and occasioned him to stand for a moment suspended with wonder.

"My mother, you see, really wants me at Wimbledon, and it would be much worse than unkind to refuse her request."

"Oh, if that's all, say that I refuse it, not you."

"She would not believe me if I were to say so; she would have too good an opinion of you."

"Would she? I am very much obliged to her; and am extremely sorry to be compelled to disappoint any favourable sentiments she may entertain of me; but I cannot let you go, Matilda—I want you at home."

"At home, Charles!" she repeated, with an incredulous smile.

"Well, well," he replied impatiently, "I do not choose you to go, that's enough. Your mother has plenty of servants to take care of her children; and if not, let her attend to them herself. It will be no loss to her to give up the races for once—for that is the plain English of the story. The very particular reasons she has for wishing you to go directly, are neither more nor less than that she is expiring to be on the barouche-box at the race-course; and she wants you to be with her time enough to give her an opportunity of gratifying this wish, in affording her a decent excuse for quitting her sick children, by saying she leaves them under your care. This is the true state of the case, you know, Matilda."

"And if it were, Charles, which you can only guess at, (though, indeed," Matilda mentally added, "I believe you are very near the mark,) if such should be the case, I have nothing to do with it; all that concerns me is to do my duty. I hold it to be a duty to oblige my mother, if I can do so without infringing upon other and more important duties."

"You do not then consider it a more important duty to oblige your husband?"

"Assuredly I do, when he asks of me any thing I ought to concede to him; which, indeed, Charles, I do not think you ask of me now."

"Oh, if you come to be so confoundedly sententious," he replied, "I have nothing more to say. I see you will be so devilishly disagreeable if you go with us, that you will spoil all the pleasure of the day; and so you may as well turn off in the poney-chaise as soon as you like; only that I must say it is very ill behaviour of you, Matilda, and excessively disobliging;"—and very angry indeed, as all people are who are conscious of being themselves by far the most offending in a dispute, Charles began his breakfast, muttering and eating, uninterrupted by his wife, who stood by the window, wiping away her tears, and trying to compose her countenance.

If she had been within the reach of amusement at the present juncture, she must have derived some portion of it in listening to the ejaculations of Charles, who, in every interval which was not dedicated to eating, employed his oratorical powers in short, but vehement denunciations against selfish persons; amongst whom he particularly specified his wife, and his wife's mother.

"I don't believe," he declared, "I verily do not believe that there is any other person in the world but Mrs. Belgrave who could propose such an impudent, such an unheard of request, as that you, who have an establishment of your own to take care of, and business and pleasures of your own to pursue, should give them up at a moment's notice, and obey her summons, just for all the world as if you yourself were still in leading-strings."

He paused for Matilda to advance any thing she might have to oppose to this; but she said nothing, and still more irritated by her silence, he proceeded in a higher key.

"Nor do I think there is any woman in the world, besides yourself, who would acquiesce in such assurance; and you would not, if it were not for the delight of opposition. But you are all alike for that. You could not live without it—its meat, drink, and clothing to you."

He paused again, but still Matilda said nothing, except to ask him if he would take any more tea, to which he replied by placing his cup upon the table, with an energy that almost cracked it in twain.

Unmoved by this intemperate action, she filled it with the utmost placidity; and then, rising from her seat, she calmly requested to know if she could do any thing more for him before she went.

He replied by a brief and angry negative.

"If my mother should wish me to stay till to-morrow, Charles, as she probably will, have you any objection?"

"If I had, I should not mention it, because I should not expect you would attend to it."

She had hitherto without much difficulty refrained from speaking, but she could not any longer remain silent.

"You should not say that, Charles," she replied, with tears, which had long been trembling in her eyes, now stealing down her cheeks; "if you give me any sufficient reason for my not going at all, I am quite ready to yield to it. Hitherto you must be well aware that you have offered none."

"A husband's will we are sometimes taught to suppose a sufficient reason for what he requires," he replied with much dignity.

"An ungenerous, narrow-minded man may make such a plea for demanding obedience; but you must not, Charles. Your are not ungenerous or narrow-minded—you are only misled. My dear Charles," and she took his hand for a moment, and tried to repeat the so often neglected counsel; but emotion checked her words, and she turned from him incapable of adding another syllable.

But had she spoken volumes of monition, her eloquence would have been less touching than such a silence.

The patience, the forbearance, the sweetness of her disposition, unmoved by the unprovoked affronts with which he had assailed it, struck upon the penitent heart of Charles, who, snatching her to his bosom, kissed away her tears, with which, volatile as he was, he could not refrain from mingling his own, though but for an instant, and with a sentiment which made him struggle to repress and to conceal them.

"My dear little Matty!" he exclaimed, "you shall go when you like, and stay as long as you like; and perhaps, love, it is as well that you should give up the races; it is a noisy, dusty, disagreeable scene."

"Could we not both—" Matilda falteringly began.

"Both go to Wimbledon!—oh, no, my dear girl, that's quite impossible. Besides that I am not wanted there, your mother and I always quarrel; and

then I stand so committed to the Hunters! Oh, no, it is quite essential—I *must* myself go to the races! But do you go to your mother. Not but what it is abominably selfish of her, and so I shall tell her the first opportunity; and I don't care—"

Matilda, finding it in vain to hope to influence him to abandon his scheme, here interrupted the further explosion of his ire against Mrs. Belgrave, by proposing to retire and equip herself for her ride.

She speedily returned, and at the same moment that Charles handed her into her humble equipage, she had the satisfaction of perceiving the "*charming set-out*" of which he had spoken, with, "*the beautiful greys*," dashing up the street to receive him.

He insisted upon her stopping a moment, to take a view of so bewitching a sight; but remarking the languid applause with which she viewed these appointments, he at length suffered her to depart, observing in his "good bye," "though you are an excellent creature, Matty, it cannot be denied, still it is your misfortune to have as little taste for what is the proper thing in equipage, as any person I ever happened to meet with."

CHAPTER VI.

THE illness of the children, not in itself particularly dangerous, was, Matilda more than suspected, considerably exaggerated by her mother for the purpose of accelerating her daughter's inclination or power to obey her summons; and it was with much less surprise than amusement that she found (as she supposed she should) that the surmises of Charles, as to the cause of her company being so earnestly requested, were as nearly correct as possible.

"My dear Matilda, Mr. Belgrave *insists* upon my accompanying him to the races," said Mrs. Belgrave, as soon as Matilda made her appearance in her mother's dressing-room, whither she was conducted on her arrival; and where she found her occupied as she annually, since remembrance was granted her, recollected to have seen her engaged, on the morning of Epsom races, *viz.* she was trying the most becoming position for a new hat, and every now and then, touching her cheeks with as much rouge as she considered requisite for beauty that was to command attention at so many feet from the ground as the height of a barouche-box.

"He insists upon my going," she continued, without any other pause in her employment than resulted from her attention being arrested, to observe first on

one cheek and then on the other, how the task prospered, and, finally, how they both succeeded together; and the children as you find, for I dare say you have been in the nursery (Matilda assented,) vou find them better, no doubt, than you expected from my account; my fears outran the occasion. But that is always the case, I am so apprehensive—so nervous—I declare I tremble so"—and indeed the fatigues of the toilette had occasioned a tremor, which it was not worth while to throw away, when it could be turned to so valuable an account as that of maternal sensibility—" I really tremble to such a degree, —I dare say I look very ill, don't I?"

This was an inquiry more readily made than answered: for what may be the natural expression of a countenance that is covered with rouge, it is rather difficult for common observers to say.

But Matilda was not the person to wound the self-love of any one, much less to hurt that of her mother. She contrived to answer the question without giving offence to her, or to sincerity; and Mrs. Belgrave having at length finished her arduous duties, accompanied her daughter down stairs.

Here they were met by Mr. Belgrave, who appeared not to have a moment to lose. He did just thank Matilda for coming, and desired her to make herself quite at home; and then, reminding his lady that they had so and so to call for on their road, he hurried off, without making one inquiry after Charles, or even naming him; a circumstance which somewhat surprised Matilda, who had been used, upon these occasions, to hear of a great deal of business in the betting line between her father-in-law and her

husband. But supposing it might be an accidental omission in the hurry of setting off, she gave no further thought to it.

It had been a source of anxious delight in her ride to Wimbledon, to anticipate a meeting with Mrs. St. Aubyn; but to her great disappointment, on calling at the cottage, she learned from the servant that her mistress and Mr. St. Aubyn had, on the preceding day, departed for London, where they intended to spend a week.

Matilda eagerly inquired and wrote down their address, determined that, immediately on her return to town, she would seek, and repair as far as possible her apparent neglect of so dear a friend.

It was evening when she made her visit at the cottage; and on returning home, she perceived, by the carriage at the door, that Mr. and Mrs. Belgrave were just returned.

She retreated to the nursery, intending to remain there for the rest of the evening: but scarcely had she closed the door, when the sound of Mr. Belgrave's voice, very audibly pronouncing her name, alarmed her with an idea of being inquired for. What he could possibly have to say to her, she could not imagine; for their communications had always been of rare occurrence, and since her marriage, particularly so. She was not long left to conjecture upon the subject; for she received a message, importing that "Mr. Belgrave wished to say a few words to her on a point of the last importance." She was so much accustomed to the pomp and circumstance in which he was wont to envelop the most trifling matters, that she paid little or no attention to

words which, from any other person, she would have thought to be big with meaning; and simply returning an answer, that she would wait upon him directly, she prepared to do so, by following the servant to the library, in which she found him seated with Mrs. Belgrave, who was either weeping, or employing her handkerchief in a style that indicated tears.

Matilda, slightly alarmed, inquired with some anxiety if any accident had befallen either of them in the course of the day's adventures? To which interrogation Mrs. Belgrave replied by a shake of the head, and a fresh application of the handkerchief and a smelling bottle; and Mr. Belgrave with an air of dignity, by pointing to a chair, as intimating a wish that she would be seated. "It is not necessary for me to be minute, or particularly to dwell upon the various instances in which I have endeavoured, to the utmost of my ability, to evince my deep interest and regard in your welfare, Mrs. Harcourt."

Here Matilda, who had as yet been standing in breathless anxiety, leaning over the back of a chair, conceiving a little time would elapse before Mr. Belgrave disclosed his meaning, very placidly and patiently sat down to wait for it, and he proceeded.

"I could specify (if it were becoming, or in my nature to recur to cases in which I confer a benefit,) I could, as I say, specify innumerable circumstances in which I flatter myself I have been of infinite service to you."

Matilda bent her head in token of acknowledgment: though of what, beyond a silver tea-pot when she married, she could not possibly remember.

"And you, I have no doubt," continued Mr. Belgrave, "have a grateful sense of my kindness for you; indeed, I must do you the justice to say, that you have always evinced a grateful temper and a good heart."

"Oh yes! she certainly has," exclaimed Mrs. Belgrave, in a tone of some feeling; "Matilda has always shewn that."

"To the utmost of my poor ability, I have desired to do my duty," replied Matilda in accents of surprise; wondering why such a question, at this time, and in this manner, came to be debated; "I hope I always shall continue to *endeavour* at performing it, however imperfectly I may succeed; but, my dear mother," and she rose to approach her nearer, "what is the meaning of all this?—what have I done—or what can any body have done, to call for all this alarming—this—" she paused, not knowing what further to say, without offending Mr. Belgrave, who, she well knew, particularly piqued himself upon his eloquence, and style of *managing* a subject.

"You have done nothing," replied Mrs. Belgrave; "but Charles—"

"Charles!" repeated Matilda in a faltering voice, for at the sound of his name, a thousand ideas of ruin and horror, the too probable consequences of his known imprudence, rushed upon her mind,—"Oh, what—what has he done—for God's sake, tell me?"

"Proceed, madam!" said Mr. Belgrave, addressing his wife, who in some alarm at having so abruptly told what he intended to have introduced him-

self, in his most impressive manner, looked to him, to reply to Matilda's beseeching looks and words.

"What has he done, Mr. Belgrave—what has he done?" exclaimed Matilda.

"Simply ruined himself, madam!" he replied in some indignation at the energy with which she demanded his answer; "that is all—he has lost at the races to-day more than I should think he possesses to pay, and in passing through London, I understand there was an execution in his house."

"Oh, you should not—you should not have told her so abruptly!" said Mrs. Belgrave, feeling the emotions of a mother as she saw the effect this intelligence produced upon Matilda; who, less surprised than shocked, sunk down upon her chair, motionless and speechless, and only by her heavy sighs indicating that she retained a consciousness of her misfortunes.

"My dear Matilda, don't make yourself so unhappy!" said Mrs. Belgrave, approaching and endeavouring to soothe her; for her feelings were really affected by the distress of a daughter, whose unassuming but inestimable virtues had made their impression even upon *her* vain and selfish heart.

While she was proceeding in a strain of commonplace consolation, Mr. Belgrave, a little softened at the sight of Matilda's distress, was venting a small quantity of wrath against Charles, whom he stigmatised as a fool in good set terms; assuring Matilda, by way of comfort, that he had for more than a twelvemonth been as satisfied that there must be a "*blow-up*," as he called it, in his affairs, before the

expiration of another year, as he was of his own existence ; appealing to Mrs. Belgrave to confirm this assertion, by inquiring of her, " Have you not repeatedly heard me say this, Mrs. Belgrave ? Do you ever remember me to have returned from visiting Mr. Harcourt, and remarking the profuse expenditure of his establishment, without predicting the downfall of it ?"

" Poor Charles !" Matilda, in the midst of her justifiable anger at his rashness, could not refrain from saying upon hearing this ; remembering, as she well did, how the best of every thing he possessed had always been produced for the pleasure and benefit of this very man, who acknowledged that he never returned from enjoying it without predicting the ruin of the person who had been so hospitably entertaining him. " Poor Charles," she continued ; " but I should wish to go to him immediately—you will permit me, Sir, perhaps, the use of your carriage."

" Undoubtedly I would if it were proper," replied Mr. Belgrave ; " but at this hour," and he looked at his watch, " nothing can be done ; your going to a house in such confusion as your's, would be only seeking additional trouble. To-morrow morning my carriage shall be at your command, at as early an hour as possible."

Matilda, powerless to oppose this, and guided by the good sense which in every emergency befriended her, saw indeed no possibility of her being useful, or any thing but an additional source of uneasiness to her imprudent husband, by returning to him at such a moment as the present ; she therefore yielded *a melancholy* acquiescence to what Mr. Belgrave re-

commended; though to extend her compliance to his request that she would resume her seat, and suffer him to offer her a few words of advice, was a further concession which her exhausted spirits could not support.

"I must beg you to excuse me, Sir, to-night," she meekly, but steadily replied, "I am not sufficiently calm to benefit by any human counsel—I must,"—she would have said, "I must seek for better aid"—but a momentary recollection of the probability of her not being understood, restrained her words—and she was retiring from the room, arrested at the door, however, by Mrs. Belgrave, who with real solicitude intreated her not to go moping by herself, but to stay with them a little longer.

Matilda shook her head in token of a negative. "Let Watkins then make you some white-wine whey, or what will you take?" she inquired: ingeniously supposing, as many excellent persons do, that "*something warm*," as they phrase it, is of sovereign efficacy in driving away grief.

The poor Matilda, quite worn with agitation, now almost impatiently repeated, "Nothing—nothing"—and Mrs. Belgrave, pardoning what she considered as very excusable ill-temper under such aggravated injuries, at length suffered her to depart without further proposals for her benefit.

"Was I ever happy—had I ever an hour of uninterrupted joy!" said the suffering Matilda, when solitude afforded her the indulgence of grief; but instantly repelling a thought, which religion, that powerful principle, never long absent from her pious

mind, suggested as little less than impious, "Oh, forgive me!" she exclaimed, lifting up to Heaven her streaming eyes, "forgive these murmurs—these rebellious sighs! I am chastened and corrected—but I am not cast away,"—and as she spoke, there came to her thoughts, sweet, comforting portions of those divine writings, which day by day she loved to meditate upon.

"Yes," she continued, "He hath chastened and corrected me, but He hath not given me over unto death:" but Charles, that poor unhappy being, oh! was *he* rescued from perdition! The ruin of his worldly matters was heavy enough, but ruin worse than this she trembled to anticipate for him:—and as this idea, more terrible to her than that of imprisonment or death, took possession of her mind, she sunk upon her knees, fervently praying that his misfortunes might be sanctified to him, and that the hour of adversity might be the date of his reformation.

In the midst of the severest affliction there is more than consolation, there is a joy in devotion which not only disarms grief, but which converts it not unfrequently into the best of blessings. Whatever tends to elevate the thoughts and carry the heart to God, (and to a well-ordered mind calamity has this immediate and direct influence) however acute may be the temporary distress it occasions, brings with it a sanctifying balm, in the seeking, imploring spirit it inspires. Those that have never suffered may go on in their prosperity, blindly happy, and asking nothing beyond the felicity which satisfies their mortal

senses—and the world counts them enviable: but outward circumstances are seldom the test of truth, and poverty and sickness, and the deprivation of every thing that is by the great mass of mankind most valued and pursued, are very often accompanied with such unfading happiness in the entire dependence upon Providence, the meek submission to His will, and the amelioration of heart which it is the design and nature of adversity to produce, that if it were given to us in our present state, to understand fully "the things that belong to our peace," is it hardly visionary to believe that there would be as much contention for suffering and privation, as there is now for full-blown enjoyment, and luxurious delights?

The calm resignation which by nature and by the discipline which circumstances had enforced, formed a principal trait in the character of Matilda, enabled her when her mind was soothed by prayer, to sit down and steadily to think upon what course she and her unfortunate husband must now pursue; though but to think of it was, as she believed, to think only of increasing difficulties and aggravated distress. Charles had no method, no conduct, no principle, nothing but an inordinate love of what he so falsely, so ruinously termed pleasure; and till that restless desire of enjoyment was subdued, well she knew that no reasonable hope of his being even tolerably prudent could be expected. But now, if ever—now that ruin had come upon him, he must be taught by rigid necessity; and, in his not having any longer the power to do wrong, she sighed to believe she possessed the only pledge of his ever doing right.

She *could only* again commend both his fate and

her own to the Great Governor of fate; and trusting in divine guidance and support, she sought her pillow.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM a heavy oppressive slumber, into which, towards morning, Matilda had fallen, she was wakened by the housemaid, who stood by her bed-side with a letter, which a man, she said, had brought from London, with orders to have it delivered immediately to Mrs. Harcourt.

She started up, and perceiving the hand-writing of Charles, she hastily tore it open, and read as follows:—

"My dearest Matty,

"I had the confoundedest luck on the race-course yesterday that ever mortal man had—I lost more than I dare to tell you; and because that was not bad enough, that d—d fellow C——, who has been persecuting me I don't know how long for rent, has taken advantage of my misfortunes, and has put an execution in the house. An arrest from another quarter soon followed; and I am in limbo at present, at ———, in Chancery Lane. Do, my dear girl, come to me forthwith, and advise who I am to send to in this devilish dilemma. Old Willett is too angry with me for not following his advice, to have

any thing to say to me. As for Belgrave, I know he will do nothing for me, as he has shyed me ever since I asked him, a few months since, to do the civil thing, and lend me a thousand or two. But before you leave Wimbledon, you may as well try and get the right side of your mother, and set her upon him. A thousand will clear me of the present embarrassment; and if you can get that for me, I will pledge myself to you, Matty, to do any thing in the way of reforming that you recommend. If you can make nothing of the Belgraves, come as quickly as possible to me, and I will tell you of another scheme, though I am almost ashamed to propose it; and you may be assured that nothing but the last extremity shall drive me to it.

"Yours ever,—C. H."

What this last scheme was, Matilda had no difficulty in understanding, and without driving him to the disgrace of being compelled to propose it, she had resolved, in considering the matter, to offer to renounce in his behalf the settlement he had made upon her on her marriage; though she anticipated, from the fervent interest he had ever felt in her welfare, that Mr. St. Aubyn, who was one of her trustees, would oppose such a measure, with a resistance she would find it difficult to overcome.

To her intreaties, however, she expected he would finally yield; and a present relief for her husband's necessities being at hand, she had lost some of the horror she at first experienced, in hearing what had fallen upon him.

Still she was most uneasy, most anxious to see

him freed from his present disgraceful situation; and desiring the servant to carry a respectful message from her to Mr. Belgrave, importing her wish to have the use of his carriage to town, she rose, and began with great speed to dress herself.

She felt so perfectly assured that any application to him for assistance, either from herself or through the medium of her mother, would be ineffectual, that she avoided to request an interview with either; and only desirous of getting away as fast as she could to the relief of her husband, she descended as soon as she was dressed, hoping to find the carriage ready for her at the door.

But on inquiring for it she found that Mr. Belgrave had not ordered it till after breakfast, as he intended accompanying her to London.

Such a procedure a little astonished her; as from what she knew of her father-in-law's character, she should have imagined him to be about the last person who would volunteer a visit to any body in difficult circumstances. But, willing to believe she had judged him too hastily, and supposing it possible that he really might feel desirous of assisting and supporting, in such a trying situation, a woman so young, and so unused to act in embarrassing cases as herself, she thought, upon further consideration, that Mr. Belgrave had judged very wisely, and accordingly she sat down with great patience to wait his arrival in the breakfast-room. Mrs. Belgrave, after a very long interval, was the first to appear; dressed with as much attention to fashion as if the very name of sorrow were a stranger to her thoughts. She inquired after her daughter's health and spirits with a

degree of interest, though of a much less lively kind than she had evinced on the preceding evening.

But Matilda was accustomed to all the variations of her mother's mind, and never having received much from her, she was not exhorbitant in her demands upon maternal kindness.

She was a little grieved indeed, and almost shocked, when Mrs. Belgrave, after a short silence, with a look which too well reminded Matilda of her early days of trembling and subjection, addressed her thus :—

"I did not say any thing to you last night, Matilda, because I made allowance for your grief at Charles's behaviour; but I should consider myself as very ill discharging the duties of a mother, were I to suffer you to depart to your misguided husband, without offering you my best counsel as to your future conduct."

"My conduct!" Matilda mildly repeated, half doubting, from the manner and tone in which Mrs. Belgrave spoke, whether she did not impute the difficulties of Charles to some errors of her daughter.

"Yes—your conduct. You have an exceedingly difficult part to act."

"Surely not," said Matilda, anxiously desiring to shrink from a discussion, which the difference of thinking between her and her mother upon all essential points, promised to render an unpleasant one, "I have only, in this emergency, to strive at doing my duty."

"And what do *you* call your duty?" inquired Mrs. Belgrave, "to remain with your husband, I suppose."

"To remain with him!" replied Matilda in undisguised astonishment, "upon what principle of conduct should I think of doing otherwise?"

"Oh, I have nothing to say to it," said Mrs. Belgrave, wholly incapable of replying to this, and not well knowing how to conduct the counsel she intended to propose; "I never, in my life had any taste for quibbling and talking logic, as you were always so fond of, Matilda; I have nothing but plain good advice to offer, and you may follow it, or not, as you think proper."

Matilda hereupon felt herself obliged to inquire what advice her mother was about to propose to her: but as she spoke, Mr. Belgrave with great pomp and solemnity entered the room, and Mrs. Belgrave waived the question by remarking, "Here is Mr. Belgrave: he is more calculated to enter into argument with you than I am; I don't love disquisitions —I am fond of simplicity."

Teazed and miserable as she was, Matilda could scarcely forbear a smile, at an avowal on her mother's part so much in opposition to every fact in her history. But as every moment of her time was precious, she could not afford to lose it in calculating upon what this extreme simplicity at present concealed, and that she might comprehend it as speedily as possible, she turned to Mr. Belgrave, and requested he would inform her, if he could, what were her mother's wishes and advice respecting her.

Before Mr. Belgrave could be intelligible, he had also something to say upon his particular method of doing things, and the extreme disinterestedness which upon all occasions, he believed it would not be unbe-

coming in him to remark, so peculiarly distinguished his conduct.

"Now, in what I am going to propose to you, Mrs. Harcourt," he continued, "I may presume to say, I am offering what few men in my circumstances could have the generosity to do, situated as I am with a rising family about me, who must all in due time, separately and individually, have the education and fortunes of ladies and gentlemen; there are few persons," he continued, with increasing fervour, as if warmed and charmed with the nobleness of his own character, "who could voluntarily offer you the asylum of his house, the protection of a home as I now offer it you, not as a temporary thing, but for as long a time as you may choose to enjoy it; in short, for a constancy, I may say; as I cannot but suppose you gratefully happy to avail yourself of it."

Matilda did not immediately reply to this astonishing liberality; for, in truth, she knew not exactly how to comprehend it, though from her mother's previous hints, and the exclusive manner in which Mr. Belgrave had addressed himself to her, she had little difficulty in supposing that the advice which was to be proposed to her, or rather the line of conduct which was to be forced upon her (as from Mr. Belgrave's style of introducing the business, it did not appear that he gave her an option,) comprised injunctions to separate herself from her husband.

But not choosing to suppose it possible that such a violation, as she considered it, of sacred duty, could have been seriously proposed, she said nothing, but only bent her head in acknowledgment of the

wonderful kindness which Mr. Belgrave assured her he was evincing for her, and he proceeded:

"To be sure both Mrs. Belgrave and myself shall not think it an encroachment upon you, if all we ask of you, in return for our protection, is to resume the instruction of the children, as you were in the habit of carrying it on, previous to your unfortunate marriage—but of that marriage we will as soon as possible lose all remembrance—Mr. Harcourt must be left to the consequences of his faults—you will have your marriage settlement—"

"Oh, pardon me, Sir," exclaimed Matilda, now feeling herself imperiously called upon to speak, "pardon me, if I say at once, that however kindly intentioned your proposal may be, it is quite impossible that for a single moment I should hesitate in declining it."

"In declining it!" repeated Mr. Belgrave, "in declining it *Mistress* Harcourt! Surely I cannot hear you right, you cannot surely think of living with Mr. Harcourt in a prison, for a prison must eventually be his home."

"Then it must be mine also," replied Matilda, with a firmness which announced a determination that nothing could shake.

"Oh, certainly, if you approve of such an abode, ma'am," said he, with a smile which ill-concealed a vast deal of wrath and indignation, at the small account she seemed to make of the unparalleled generosity he had been so eloquent upon, and at the decided opposition she gave to his counsel. "If you prefer the King's-Bench to Belgrave Lodge, and Dover street, Piccadilly, I don't know who should

interfere to disturb your taste. Most assuredly I shall not."

"Nor I," said Mrs Belgrave. Then, as if feeling that her conduct wanted some excuse, she endeavoured to discover it, in taxing her daughter with an obstinacy, "which always had been," she said, "a stumbling-block in the way of her happiness. You know very well, Matilda," she continued, "that it is nothing in the world but downright obstinacy that makes you so determined upon continuing with Charles, for it is impossible that, in your heart, you can wish to live with a man who is going to ruin as fast as he can; and who himself, I dare say, if the truth were known, would be very thankful to have you so well provided for."

"When Charles wishes to part with me," said Matilda, "I shall have nothing to say in opposition to it; but till *he* proposes such a measure, I will never give it a thought. It would be a strange way of performing one's duty, to run away from it as soon as it becomes painful. No, I will remain with him, though it should be in poverty, or imprisonment, or death. I fear that I am likely to be his only friend—it doubly behoves me, then, to be faithful."

There was no mistaking the meaning of her last observation; and, a little ashamed of his selfishness, which, however he laboriously endeavoured to conceal, was still too apparent, Mr. Belgrave attempted to excuse his determination not to come forward in the present emergency, by remarking,—

"I have a great respect for you, Mrs. Harcourt, inasmuch as I have always observed you to conduct

yourself with that diffidence and modesty of manner, which is so peculiarly becoming in a female; and to prove to you my regard, I have just now made you such an offer, as I confess it somewhat astonishes me to hear you decline. But respecting your husband, I have never had but one opinion; and that opinion leads me to say, that if I possessed thousands that were useless to me, I should think I turned them to better account in throwing them into the street, than in bestowing them upon a man who literally does not know the use of money. And I would not have you think that, in expressing myself thus, I mean the slightest disrespect to you."

"Sir, I do not suppose so," said Matilda, wearied to death with his pompous prosing, and anxiously waiting for the moment of her departure; "I am willing to believe that you do not mean to offend me; but I must be permitted to say that the discussion of my husband's faults, however great those faults may be, is to me so very irksome a theme, that I shall not be sorry to put an end to it as soon as possible. I have had a letter from him requesting to see me. As you were so obliging last night as to offer me the use of your carriage to town, will you permit me now to avail myself of it, as indeed I am extremely anxious to go to him?"

The earnestness with which she spoke was not to be resisted; and Mr. Belgrave, though not with the most obliging mien, rang the bell, and gave orders for the carriage, observing when the servant retired, "as I did not calculate upon the possibility of your refusing the offer I made you, I intended to have accompanied you to London, for the purpose of talk-

ing the matter over and arranging it with Charles; but as I find you so bent upon following your own opinion, my presence will not, I apprehend, be necessary. Perhaps you will permit me to inquire where Mr. Harcourt has taken up his present abode?"

Matilda informed him.

"No—Chancery-Lane!" he repeated, "a most respectable place, no doubt, for a lady to appear in!"

"My dear Matilda," said Mrs. Belgrave, "let me beseech you to think of what you are about; and do not upon any account expose yourself, by rambling after your husband to such disreputable places."

"Charles would not desire me to come to any disreputable place," said Matilda, fretted to the soul, and hardly able to conceal her tears, but willing, if possible, to restrain her temper, which, placid as it was, could scarcely resist the pressure of these accumulated aggravations.

Mrs. Belgrave proceeded to shew that Charles was likely to do any thing, and every thing that was wrong, in a manner that Matilda could hardly have much longer supported; but to her inexpressible joy the carriage was at length announced; and, after summing up in a very short compass, all that he had previously said and insinuated, by plainly assuring her that no kind of assistance, in his difficulties, must Charles expect from him, Mr. Belgrave accompanied her to the carriage door, and with a solemn bow took his leave, and Matilda departed.

"Surely nobody ever was treated as I am!" she could not refrain from saying, as, with a violent burst of tears, that relieved, even while it seemed to break her heart, she threw herself back in the carriage,

only comforted by the recollection that, in all probability, she should see little or nothing of Mr. Belgrave for the future.

The mind is generally particularly disposed for meditation when lulled by the motion of a carriage. Images then seem to come with a more vivid impression upon the fancy; and all that was miserable and distressing Matilda had assembled in mental vision around her poor husband, during her short journey; and, little as she had been accustomed to see him oppressed with unhappy reflections, she had not a doubt of finding him, for once in his life, excessively wretched.

In pity to his sufferings, she prepared herself to meet him, not only without a word or look of reproach, but with all the sympathy which affliction ever excited in her gentle bosom. The carriage at length turned up Chancery Lane. The sight of a miserable dwelling, every window of which was covered with iron bars, informed her that she was arrived at the destined place. The street door was open; but beyond it was another door, at which a surly man presented himself, who, after a long and impudent survey of her figure, during which he seemed to consider if any thing could be got by admitting her, at length replied to her inquiries—"that Mr. Harcourt was up stairs, and he would see if she could be admitted."

A message was soon brought down from Charles, desiring her to walk up stairs; and following her conductor, she found herself in the presence of her husband; who, far from displaying any of the profound grief she expected, received her with a laugh, and a

careless remark—"that this was altogether a devilish business."

"But, my dear Matty," said he, as soon as they were alone, "have you been able to do any thing for me at Wimbledon?"

She shook her head—she could not indeed speak; for to discover him thus unmoved by the consequences of his misconduct, was infinitely more affecting to her than to have found him a prey to the most overwhelming grief. From sorrow she could have extracted some hope; but from levity she knew by fatal experience, that nothing but accumulated disgrace could accrue.

It was not long, however, before she discovered with increased wretchedness, that the spirits of Charles had been elevated by means to which she had long suspected him of occasionally resorting in his difficulties; he had evidently passed the night in drinking, and was yet partially under the influence of intoxication. She cast a look of grief upon his haggard countenance and neglected dress, and overpowered with the reflection his appearance inspired, she turned from him, and burst into tears.

Shocked at this sight, though too conscious of the sufficient cause he had given for it to be surprised, Charles for some minutes remained silent; incapable of comforting her, and yet ashamed of not doing so: at last he spoke.

"I know that I deserve your reproaches, Matty—I know all that—but hear me!"—and he spoke with the desperation of a ruined man—angry, loud, vindictive, and all that was hateful,—"hear me, I say!"

"Nay Charles, forbear,"—and she took his hand, "forbear—I will not—I do not reproach,—but have some pity on me—will nobody speak kindly to me?" and, quite exhausted with the repeated trials which had been heaped upon her, she sunk down in her chair, and sobbed with agony.

She did not weep alone. Her genuine grief touched the heart of Charles, and his tears fell plentifully.

She struggled for composure; and believing that she had regained it, she came towards him, pitying and forgiving.

He took her hand, and pressed it fervently to his heart, drawing her towards him, and kissing her tenderly, "Oh Matty, I am unworthy of you—dearest, best of wives!" he said; "only tell me what I shall do—what you would wish me to do—only speak, and to the utmost of my power I will obey you."

"I will think, and give you my best counsel," she replied, sitting down by him, still retaining his hand in one of hers, whilst with the other she pressed her throbbing forehead, and tried to collect her disturbed thoughts. "Mr. St. Aubyn and his mother are now in town," she said, telling him how she had learned their address; "I will go to them directly. If Mr. St. Aubyn consents—and I will implore him, I will never leave him till he has consented—I will give up to you, Charles, all that I possess; and let it be the pledge of peace between us—my dear husband, let it be the pledge of better days!"

He replied only by clasping her to his heart—he could say nothing; and Matilda, with a delicacy which enhanced her generosity, hastened away from witnessing his confusion: and drawing her veil over her agitated countenance, she hurried into the coach

which was to convey her to Mrs. St. Aubyn, and through her she intended to make application to her guardian.

CHAPTER VIII.

It is a trite remark, but it is a true one, that we know not what we can do, till we are called upon to try our strength. Matilda, naturally the most timid and retiring of women, urged by the exigencies of fate, was now metamorphosed into an active and leading character in the drama of life.

But, heroic as she was, in pursuing what she conceived to be her duty (*viz.* to assist her husband,) she did shrink from the anticipated interview both with Mrs. St. Aubyn and her son, though assured of the affection they felt for her—and the commisseration with which they would hear of her misfortunes. Do what she could to make the best of it, Charles *must* appear unpardonably to blame; and she could scarcely expect but their opinion of his misconduct would be strongly expressed, unless they were gifted in a super-human degree with the "charity which thinketh no evil." It is very difficult indeed to be quiet respecting the backslidings of our neighbours; they reflect so much credit upon the penetration with which we have detected them, and predicted their consequences. If it were not for this, we should, upon the whole, have good-nature enough to be exceedingly sorry for every failure of

a friend, and lament with great sincerity that all of our acquaintance were not as perfect as ourselves. But unfortunately for the cause of good-nature, it is so triumphant a thing to judge rightly, that few persons, in hearing of the ruin of a most particular friend, are backward in announcing the confidence with which they had foreseen it.

It was fortunate that the necessity for acting, overpowered the propensity for reflection, which, with a sickening pang, every instant rose to the mind of Matilda, as she approached Mrs. St. Aubyn's lodgings.

On inquiring at the door if she was at home, she received an answer that the servant did not know, but she was requested to walk in. On entering the house, she was shewn into a room, where, instead of Mrs. St. Aubyn, she found St. Aubyn alone.

"Matil—Mrs. Harcourt!"

"Good Heavens!" he continued, perceiving even through her veil the quivering of her lips, and the painful agitation of every feature, as she vainly essayed to speak.

"It was Mrs. St. Aubyn," she did just articulate, as she cast herself into the chair he placed for her —himself hanging over it in an agony of fear and doubt as to what she came to communicate.

"My mother was it that you wished to see?" I fear she has just left the house, but she will return in a few minutes—in the mean time, can you not tell *me*—can you not confide in me?"

"Oh, yes—yes!—but what will you think—what will you think of my poor Charles, when I tell you how imprudent"—she could not go on. St. Aubyn

hastily took her hand, and raised it to his lips—but instantly resigning it, "I shall ever think of him as the husband of Matilda." Never had he with so much difficulty restrained himself from saying more. "Of her whom I would die to serve!" were words that trembled on his tongue—but he gave them no utterance.

Hesitating and faltering, Matilda began her sad narrative; but scarcely had she named an arrest—an execution—

"But where were you—for God's sake where were you?" said St. Aubyn, turning pale as he made the inquiry.

"I was at Wimbledon with my mother."

"Thank God," said he, "it is some comfort to hear that—and where is Mr. Harcourt now?"

She told him—adding that she had just left him.

"And could he call you"—but he corrected himself; "I mean—nay, I scarcely know what I mean"—and for a moment or two St. Aubyn leaned his head upon his hand, and was silent. "Have you been alone in this undertaking?" at last he asked.

"I had no friend to take with me," she replied sorrowfully; "and I know it was not correct—but indeed, dear Mr. St. Aubyn, you should not blame me."

"Blame *you!*" he repeated with a faltering voice and tearful eyes, "God bless you, Matilda—God bless you!" and he almost wrung her hand in the earnestness with which he spoke, though he instantly dropt it from his grasp.

"No—you would not blame me—I knew you would not, for you are all kindness and goodness!"

and she again extended her hand to him, which he took, though with an averted face—for he felt as if he dared not look upon her; "and you must not blame poor Charles more than you can possibly help —he is deeply sensible of his errors, he is truly penitent—and if you will but consent to my entreaty" —she paused—

"Name any thing—my whole fortune,"

"Not *your* fortune, dear Mr. St. Aubyn; never shall your fortune be injured by me or mine, if I can help it. It is my fortune to which you are"—

"It cannot be—it *cannot* be, Matilda," he resolutely pronounced, to spare her urging a proposal to which he was determined never to consent; "your fortune is far more important to me than my own; I hold it as a sacred trust, and I never will relinquish it while I have life."

"Oh, don't be so obdurate," and she took his hand in both her own to aid her sweet persuasive countenance, down which the tears were trickling fast. "Have you not known me from a child? and have you not been ever kind to me? and will you now"—

"Matilda—Matilda—if you wish me to keep my senses, ask me nothing that it is my duty to refuse—ask me nothing with such a countenance as that,—oh! was not life bitter enough before," he half pronounced, "not bitter enough, without knowing of *your* unhappiness!" But his accents were too broken and low to reach the ear of Matilda; who still, as a child in supplication to a parent, hung sobbing upon his hand, uttering imperfect entreaties that he would yield to her request.

"Oh, hear me—hear me! he exclaimed, and re-

ver was an avowal of attachment so nearly made! almost had he cast himself at her feet—almost had he implored her to take all his fortune for the relief of her husband, whilst he himself would quit her sight for ever, and go to some distant country, happy to seek his bread for the love he bore her—*almost* had all this been said, but religion came to his aid. —"My God, defend me from myself!" was a prayer, which, uttered in the momentary uplifting of his virtuous heart, brought with it instantaneous strength.

He seated her, and gently releasing his hand from hers, he retired for a moment to the window: Matilda hoped and believed to consider of what she had said, and to return her a propitious answer.

But it was to wipe away his tears—to stifle his emotion.

He came towards her in a few minutes, calm and collected; and, without giving a direct answer to her passionate inquiries if he yielded to her request.

"I cannot so well talk to you upon this point, my dear Matilda," he said, "as to Mr. Harcourt; I will go to him immediately. In the meanwhile oblige me by remaining here. My mother will return in a few minutes, and will be delighted to see you."

"But you will"—Matilda began to say—"you will—"

"I will do every thing that is possible to serve you," said he, interrupting her; and before she could utter another word he was gone.

He had been gone about a quarter of an hour, and Matilda had but just soothed herself into a state of more composure, when a knock at the door agitated her with fresh emotion at the idea of Mrs. St. Au-

byn's approach, and the necessity for a repetition of her unhappy story. The probability of being received with distant coldness by her earliest friend, had been forgotten amidst the greater anxieties which now pressed upon her; and no sooner did she perceive her enter the room, than she flew towards her, as a child to the sheltering bosom of a parent.

But Catherine, high-spirited and jealous of respect, however sincerely she loved her young friend, had not quite patiently submitted to be neglected, as it appeared to her that, since Matilda's marriage, she had been; and having surmounted the first pleasurable surprise at so unexpectedly discovering her, which involuntarily sent a smile to her countenance, she a little drew back from Matilda's advances, and only extending her hand, "she hoped she saw her well."

To meet a cold expression in a face that has usually been turned upon us with a smile, produces upon the mind an effect something analogous to that which the bodily frame receives from a cold bath; and, with scarcely less tremor than she would have experienced from such a sudden immersion, Matilda turned away, and sunk down in her chair.

"I know that I deserve this!" she said, "but just now"—she covered her face with her handkerchief, and relieved her breaking heart with a flood of tears.

Never was any species of distress unavailingly addressed to the heart of Mrs. St. Aubyn.

"Nay—nay, Matilda," and hastening towards her, she fondly kissed her cheek; whilst Matilda, melted by her tenderness, and by her own various sorrows,

to a state of infant weakness, could utter nothing but convulsive sobs, though trying to speak intelligibly, and give some reply to the anxious inquiries which mingled with the soothing caresses of Catherine, as to the cause of her distress.

By degrees she became more calm; but not sufficiently so to give a very connected account of what had happened. The quick tact of Mrs. St. Aubyn did not, however, require more than the brief and sorrowful relation Matilda's exhausted spirits could afford.

"And could I have the heart to meet you as I did?" said she, again and again pressing Matilda to her bosom. "But I thought, love, that you had neglected me."

"Not voluntarily," said Matlda, "I never did—I never could; for have you not ever been to me as kind —as kind did I say?—oh, how much kinder than my own mother!"

"Ah, my dear girl, your trials have been great indeed! and I am not at this moment without mine. But stubborn matters of fact have been your sorrows," said Mrs. St. Aubyn. "Mine," she continued, with a heavy sigh, "are more the result of restleness of spirit, yet not the less oppressive."

Matilda looked at her anxiously, and painfully observed a manifest alteration in her appearance since last they met. Her form was shrunk—the animation of her fine expressive countenance had fled, and it was now pale and hollow; yet she appeared far more altered in mental than bodily health—not a ray of the sparkling intelligence, which seldom long forsook her features, remained. To Matilda's imagination

realised a line in Milton; she was indeed, she thought,

"Exhausted, spiritless, afflicted, fallen."

Yet, with all this evident dejection about her, she appeared unwilling to yield to its influence, or to have it remarked; for, on Matilda's replying with deep interest to her last observation,

"Are you too a sufferer, dear Mrs. St. Aubyn?"

"A sufferer only from my own heart, Matilda," said she, again sighing as it were unconsciously. But, repelling her feelings with a visible effort—"I have not been well," said she, "of late, and Edmund has not been well," and that has made me fret, and fretting makes one look like a ghost; in truth, I thought it was going to make a ghost of me, and Edmund thought so too, I believe, for he would insist upon my coming up to town, and talking to some of the medical people here; not but what it is the thing I hate worse than I can express, for they are such horrible barbarians they always frighten one out of one's wits!"

"They have not frightened you, I hope?" said Matilda.

"Not quite signed my death-warrant," she replied, with a languid smile; "only ordered me to keep myself quiet—or else I must die—that's all"—

"Then do be quiet—pray do," said Matilda anxiously. "What can you have to make you otherwise than quiet?"

"The thoughts of death—and of eternity—Matilda; the thoughts of an immortal soul"—she replied,

with a solemnity that penetrated to the heart; and Matilda could utter no reply.

But after a short interval she spoke again, and in a tone less serious: "Matilda, I am going to make a request to you," she said, "and if you love me you will comply with it."

"If you put it upon that footing," said Matilda, "I am sure I shall not do otherwise than comply with it; you have only to name it."

"It is to accompany me to-morrow to Brighton, whither I am recommended to repair for the benefit of the sea air. I shall propably stay some time: but you shall do as you like as to the length of your visit."

Matilda had only the natural reluctance of leaving Charles in the present sad crisis of his affairs, to oppose to this proposition: and till she heard the result of Mr. St. Aubyn's conference with him, could return no other answer than a sincere wish to do every thing that could give pleasure to her friend.

CHAPTER IX.

Mr. St. Aubyn returned in the course of the morning, bringing with him Charles himself. The means by which his liberation had been effected, Matilda learned with a feeling more humiliating and wretched than any she had yet experienced, was a loan for the amount of his debt from Mr. St. Aubyn. Charles himself appeared ashamed of having been reduced to these measures, and participated, though in a very inferior degree, in the misery they brought upon his wife. St. Aubyn, on his part, was the same considerate, affectionate friend in his demeanour to Matilda—the same watchful, tender son to his mother—the same in his gentlemanlike, attentive deportment to Charles, as if all these agitating circumstances had never had any existence! and as if this day had brought him no more than any and every other day brought in the way of event.

No sooner was the Brighton scheme named in his hearing, than Charles caught at it for Matilda, with an eagerness that left her no power to decline it. The consciousness of misconduct threw a restraint over his manners, and made him so embarrassed and miserable in the presence of his wife, and those he knew to be particularly attached to her, (and consequently, as he imagined, in their hearts more espe-

cially incensed against him,) that he hailed it as an unexpected relief, so soon to be released from those further obligations, which, in the present state of his affairs, he would otherwise have been compelled to receive from them.

He obviated every objection of Matilda's to leaving him, by placing before her the real advantage her absence for a week or two would be to him at the present juncture. He had lodgings to seek, he told her—he had plans to form, &c. &c.

Matilda sickened at the very thought of *his plans*; but too well knowing that she had no influence in promoting them, of whatever kind they might be, she yielded to his wishes and the pressing instances of both Mr. and Mrs. St. Aubyn, and accompanied the latter to Brighton. Mr. St. Aubyn, on finding his mother provided with a companion so agreeable to her, but so dangerous to himself, postponed his design of attending her for the present; and Catherine, understanding and respecting his motive, was wholly silent on hearing his change of intention.

In defiance of her visible endeavours to dissipate thought, and her occasional success in appearing cheerful, there was generally such a languor and listlessness in Mrs. St. Aubyn's manners, as convinced Matilda that some source of uneasiness affected her spirits, beyond what she chose to acknowledge.

And such indeed was the case, though she strove to the utmost to conceal its existence. The fact was, that, ever since the extinction of those hopes, which every human being that loves, unconsciously cherishes, ever since Matilda's marriage, St. Aubyn had been a disappointed—an unhappy man. The

natural constancy of his temper, the calm retired character of his pursuits, and the intenseness of his feelings, had totally precluded him from seeking in a change of attachment that cure for a hopeless passion, which is commonly resorted to with great success. Miserable as he was in losing her society, in losing the beloved occupation of counselling and instructing her, it was to him far more sweet to mourn over these privations, than to have her image effaced from his mind, by a thought of any other woman.

Yet, too strongly fortified in religious principle, was St. Aubyn to yield himself a willing victim to these delusions of imagination; to fancy that he centered his affections upon a married woman, was an idea which filled him with horror—and no sooner had he considered Matilda as no longer a proper object for his impassioned contemplation, than he endeavoured by absence and change of scene, to aid his mental efforts at banishing her as much as possible from his mind. But on his return to England, their first interview restored to him all, and much more than all, of his former interest in her; for he thought he saw in that brief and sorrowful meeting, that the woman, a belief in whose happiness was all that could now impart any to himself, was mourning over disappointed hopes and blighted expectations. All that he heard of her husband confirmed this miserable supposition; and wretched in the thought of Matilda's wretchedness, St. Aubyn sunk into a state of dejection, from which nothing had the power to rouse him. Aware that he was indulging in feelings as improper as they were enervating—aware too, with almost a breaking heart, that he could do nothing to

alleviate the hard fate of his beloved Matilda, he turned his thoughts again to the recourse of flight, as, under the aid of religion, his best safeguard from ideas, which his virtuous mind recoiled from harbouring.

In this state of feeling, he received an offer of a chaplaincy, upon very advantageous terms, in the East-Indies. His first impulse was immediately to accept it. It comprised in it all that could soothe and satisfy his unhappy mind, amidst all its sorrows, turning to its Divine Master, with an earnest desire to labour in His cause, to sanctify his wounded spirit in his Maker's holy service, and upon that altar to offer up, as far as it was possible for human infirmity to do so, the last lingering remembrance of every worldly affection. It would have been gratifying to him beyond measure, as far as he was personally concerned, immediately to have closed with this proposal; but he thought of his mother—and then came many doubts; to leave her, was distressing to him—and could he expect that she would accompany him! Yet she might be willing! she, no more than himself, had any ties to bind her to her native land—she, like him, had seemed to lose her all, in losing Matilda—her mind was wearied with the world. Perhaps, she might be more than willing—she might rejoice to seek a harbour of rest, in another country indeed, but still under the guidance and protection of that God to whom he trusted they should both of them each day draw nearer and nearer.

He suggested it to her consideration: but, as he had expected, she resolutely opposed it, both for her-

self and him; and he then promised her to drop it. Yet not without regret, amounting to anguish, had he given her this promise; it was a measure of all others so consonant to his habits of thought, to his wishes, and as he believed both to his spiritual and temporal interest, that in relinquishing it, he seemed to be giving up a point of duty.

It must be remembered that St. Aubyn had been early biassed by religious tenets of a peculiar kind. It is not necessary to discuss how far they might be right or wrong; it is sufficient to say, that, however they might have been kept down by mixing with general society, he still entertained them; and it was a strong persuasion, which he would have thought it little less than impious to attempt to controvert, that this proposal to quit the kingdom, and devote himself in a more especial manner to the service of the ministry, when it was so essentially necessary to his peace of mind that he should be absent from England, and that he should be absorbed in some pursuit calculated to engross him wholly—was a direction from heaven, bestowed equally for his present and eternal consolation. The more he pondered upon this idea, the more firmly it took possession of his mind; and, with the most fervent entreaty he besought his mother to think upon the subject as he did—in a religious point of view; and if she could not immediately yield to his wishes, to suspend her decision for a few weeks.

The energetic and affecting manner in which he poured forth his thoughts upon the subject, had powerfully influenced Catherine to reflect upon it in a new light. Though she had been endeavouring for

years to make religion that calm speculative matter which the world in general make it, she had not been able to succeed: for she had within her thoughts and feelings which spoke of something far beyond those cool, quiet, moral ideas which the great mass of mankind attach to such a subject.

And now that the world was hourly receding from her grasp—that youth was gone, and sorrowful decline was daily stealing to usurp the whole of what remained of life—there came, very often, solemn thoughts—momentary ejaculations—recoil and terror as she thought of the mysterious future—remorse and regret as she viewed the wasted past.

She believed that some sacrifice was called for, on her part, to atone for many years of selfish indulgence in idle pleasures and profitless society.

But the hour of resignation—the hour of entire repentance was not yet come. Still combating with conscience—still clinging to the world, half willing to yield to Edmund's wishes and suffer him to quit her—half resolved to accompany him herself—the struggle of her mind affected her bodily health, and this was her state of suffering, which Matilda at the present time perceived, without comprehending its cause.

For more than a week Catherine continued vacillating between assumed mirth and real misery; and frequently was Matilda tempted, when she saw the starting tear endeavoured to be dissipated in a smile, to clasp her to her bosom, and implore her to tell all that she was with so much pain and difficulty vainly labouring to conceal, since, to none could she impart it, so ready to listen and to sympathise.

But the instant she perceived Matilda intently observing her, Mrs. St. Aubyn started something so foreign to the matter, that, without appearing obtrusive, Matilda could not pursue her wishes.

Accustomed to make those about her easy, by suffering them to follow their own inclinations and doing the same herself, Catherine frequently went upon a solitary ramble by the sea-shore, leaving Matilda to follow her or not, as she might feel disposed. One evening she had wandered out alone in this manner, taking with her a volume of Cowper's Poems belonging to Edmund; and removing as far as possible from the reach of observation, she sat down on the beach, and fixed her eyes upon an object, which, every time she gazed upon it, was still new in the emotions it excited. The beautiful description Madame de Stael has given of the ocean, recurred to her mind as she looked upon the vast expanse of waters before her.

"Cette superbe mer sur laquelle l'homme jamais ne peut imprimer sa trace. La terre est travaillée par lui, les montagnes sont coupées par ses routes, les rivières se reserrent en canaux pour porter ses marchandises; mais si les vaisseaux silonnent un moment les ondes, la vague vient effacer aussitôt cette legére marque de servitude, et la mer reparâit telle qu'elle fut au premier jour de la création."*

An idea more concisely and very beautifully expressed by Lord Byron:

"Time writes no wrinkles on thy polished brow,
Such as creation's dawn beheld, Thou rollest now."

* Corinne, Tome Premier, Chapitre iv. p. 24.

After a short meditation, Catherine opened her ok; but some MS. lines at the end of it, in her 's hand writing met her view. They appeared to ve been recently written with a pencil; and well ıld she conceive the emotions which had dictated m. They were as follows:—

" 'Oh world! thy slippery turns!' that poet sung,
Upon whose magic lyre persuasion hung.
Oh world deceiving, why art thou so fair,
Why are thy promises so sweet—so dear?
Why dost thou mingle souls in soft communion—
Why link affections in the loveliest union?
Twine heart with heart, and join the feeling mind
To some dear counterpart it pants to find?—
Why is it thus?—Thou know'st they must dissever,
Thou know'st thy promises were treacherous ever!
Thou know'st thy very smiles are fraught with ruin,
Tempting frail mortals to their own undoing;—
Thou know'st we seek our rest in Thee in vain,
Thy hopes are shadows—thy delights are pain?
Oh, decked to charm with artful loveliness,
To wake the sigh and prompt the fond caress,
But fading in the arms that round thee press!
Away—away—I will not look on thee,
I'll burst my bonds, and rise to liberty!
I'll take my spirit to those pleasant glades,
Those pastures green, and ever tranquil shades,
Wherein a heavenly shepherd feeds his charge,
And walks with them where cooling streams emerge.
When sunk in sorrows and with sickness worn,
He sweetly calls his wanderers to return.
'Come unto me, ye broken hearted, come!
And I will lead you to your destin'd home.
Turn from delusive joys—unreal charms,
And fix your dwelling in my sheltering arms!'
Master divine! though erring from the way,
We hear thy sacred voice—no more we stray!
No more through devious paths we wander on,
Deceiv'd, abandon'd, suffering, and undone!
But as an infant on its mother's breast,
Closes its eyes, and gently sinks to rest,

On thy dear bosom we would fall asleep,
And veil the lids that never more shall weep!"

Catherine closed the volume, and leaned her head upon her hand, and gave herself up to the train of thoughts which these lines excited. Thoughts which brought tears to her eyes—remorse to her spirit, contrition to her soul!

Her face was buried in her handkerchief—her bosom was labouring with a stifled sob—when she was recalled with sudden alarm to the recollection that she was not in a place meet for the indulgence of such emotion, by feeling a hand upon her shoulder; but raising her head to see who was the intruder, she perceived Matilda standing over her, with a countenance of deep and painful interest.

"My dear Mrs. St. Aubyn," she said, "forgive me this intrusion upon your privacy—I will not stay a moment if you do not wish it."

"Oh, yes—pray stay," and wiping away her tears, she tried to smile. "I fell just now," she continued, "upon some lines here of Edmund's—sadly methodistical to be sure! but Edmund, you know, has a turn that way—and I dont know how, they have brought old recollections to my mind; but read them, Matilda, while I walk about a little and compose myself,"—and putting the book in Matilda's hand, she left her to peruse them.

We have represented Matilda as a religious young woman, which she certainly was, in no common acceptation of the term. Still had she not adopted *all* the opinions of St. Aubyn, nor had he indeed pressed them upon her consideration. He was too libe-

ral, too humane, too desirous of humbly following the precepts of his Heavenly Master, to violate his strict command, and *judge* his fellow creatures by the fallible criterion of his own judgment.

When, as in the case of Matilda, he saw a strenuous and constant endeavour to fulfil the duties of her station, with a continual seeking by prayer for Divine aid to sustain and guide her efforts, he paused not to ask whether she pursued such and such studies, or whether she separated herself from such and such persons?—before he entertained the least hope of her salvation. He believed her to be quite as much the object of his Maker's love and mercy as himself, and quite as likely to be right in her opinions, though early prepossession did lead him to like particular preachers, to read particular books, and to lean to particular notions.

This bias was so strongly manifested in the lines Matilda read, that perhaps, as belonging herself, and wishing to belong to no party but that which was desirous of seeking and finding truth, she might have wished it less tinctured with the language of a sect, if sorrow and disappointment had not rendered her too willing to sympathise in the feelings of the writer, to criticise the style in which he had expressed them.

Affliction makes most of us of one party and of one opinion, that we are poor, helpless, sinful, suffering creatures, wholly dependent upon the mercy of that Great Being who called us out of nothing, who holds our destiny in his hands, and who will assuredly do with us according to his good pleasure.

"My poor Edmund has got terribly warped

amongst the pious, you see, Matilda," said Catherine, approaching, and endeavouring to assume a lively look and tone ; " you remarked it, no doubt?"

" I did not particularly remark that," said Matilda, with a sigh ; " the truth of the sentiments he expresses was all that engaged my attention."

" Ah, the truth !" replied Catherine, with more seriousness ; " it is the truth, Matilda. The world is very vain—yet how long do we hang upon it, as if it were our all! How many are the warnings we slight—how innumerable are the opportunities we lose of turning to something better! Oh, there is time enough for that—time enough for that, we say: and so we go on in the same senseless round—following the same empty pleasures—found in the same haunts of folly—surrounded by the same flattering fools—and seized upon by old age and death, and called upon to render up our accounts—to reckon for our time, our talents, our health, our money—all—all that has been given—to reckon for it all, Matilda before a thought has been bestowed upon the subject!"

" This may be too common a case," said Matilda: " but I have much reason to hope and believe that it is not yours ; you do think upon these things."

" I do think upon them, I must think upon them," she replied, with energy. " I have that within me which compels me to think upon them—and [illegible] in my life I more than thought—I tried to act well. I had a friend—and she was no common friend !—but I cannot well advert to this," she added, in a faltering voice, " for when I think of what she was to me, when I think of what I myself was

at that time, and what the world has since made me, I seem, Matilda, to have fallen from every hope of mercy."

"Oh, do not say that, dear Mrs. St. Aubyn!" said Matilda; "circumstances have cast you amongst a gay and fashionable circle of acquaintance, but no one would infer that you have followed the multitude to do evil; or that because"—

"No, I am well aware that I must seem to you to be refining too much; and that, while I smile at Edmund's enthusiasm, you will think I have in a great measure imbibed it myself," said Catherine, interrupting Matilda's further observations; "but I feel that once I knew something much better than what I now know—I try to recal it, but in vain. The very sense of its excellence seems to be lost to me. I pray indeed, and I seek my God; but the heart is languid and cold, and I find not what I once found in prayer. Then, I turn to the world, and there is laughter and merriment—and there is a refuge from care—and there I am found—and there death is to find me—oh, this is very fearful—very fearful!" she repeated.

"It would indeed be fearful," said Matilda, "to be so found, 'in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment,' since both are doubtless indissolubly joined—it would be fearful to be summoned away with a soul unweaned from vanity, delighting in the things of time and sense, amused with trifles, and unenlightened by any aspirations after holiness and heaven. Such a soul, indeed, could find no happiness in the presence of its Maker. Heaven would be no place for that spirit which no heavenly emotions had

ever touched. But yours is not that spirit, dear Mrs. St. Aubyn," she continued with affectionate interest; "you *are* formed for something better than the pursuits of this world—you seek to find or to regain the peace you once possessed—you *will* regain it, doubt not."

"God is indeed merciful! most merciful!" said Catherine, raising her eyes with the fervour of sincere devotion. "Matilda, pray that he will guide and comfort me now, for I am called upon for such a sacrifice!—Oh, such a sacrifice!" and she clasped her hands together as she spoke. "Oh, such a sacrifice!"

"A sacrifice!" Matilda repeated in accents of surprise.

As briefly as her excited feelings would permit, Mrs. St. Aubyn (of course without alluding to the reasons she believed to influence her son's desire) related to Matilda what had passed between them on the subject of his departure to the East.

But astonishment and regret at hearing of such a project, for a long time kept Matilda silent; nor could she, when she did speak, do otherwise than express unwillingness that it should proceed.

"Yet," said she after a short pause, "I would not be understood to offer any opinion upon so important a point. I cannot be an adviser, since I am much too deeply interested in the question. Your own regret, at the loss of such a son, cannot be much greater than mine at parting with so dear a friend, so very dear," she repeated, as she thought of his many acts of kindness and regard.

"Ah, would that he"—but Mrs. St. Aubyn check-

ed herself, ere she had added. "would that he had been as dear to you, as I could have wished, and this sacrifice I should never have been called upon to offer."

"But if his heart be set upon this measure," said Matilda; "if it be, as you admit, greatly for his temporal interest, and if he believes, and you incline to believe, that it is his duty to follow it, as a direction from the Almighty, who shall attempt to interrupt it by advice, or entreaty, or selfish considerations? I dare not," she added in a voice that trembled at the supposition; and which imparted to the already wavering mind of Mrs. St. Aubyn, a still stronger desire to be enabled to submit to what she conceived, might be the leading of Providence: yet nature struggled within her for indulgence.

"Oh, had it been any thing but this, Matilda," she said, "I could well have yielded it up. But my son, my only son!"

"Ah, it is a bitter trial!—it is, indeed, a bitter trial," said Matilda; "do you think I do not feel for you, dear Mrs. St. Aubyn?" and she looked upon her with tearful eyes. "If I then pity your conflict—if I, a poor incapable, helpless creature, would do all and every thing within my means to strengthen and comfort you—think of Him who looks upon you with power as well as pity. Oh, he is able and willing to recompense you an hundred-fold, for all that you can resign to Him; and though it be the right eye, or the right arm that we are called upon to cast from us, it is the means, perhaps, by which we are to enter upon life. If we must toil, and labour, and suffer, and endure for temporal enjoyments, is everlasting

happiness to be procured without sacrifice—without price?"

"Oh, no—no," said Catherine, "how often has my poor Ann repeated to me, when, impatient of suffering, I repined, and thought my fate hard—how often has she recalled to me that text of Scripture. 'through much tribulation ye shall enter into life.'"

"And well did she recal it to you," said Matilda. "How few have been the days in which those heavenly words have not been given to me as the solace of every woe. Dear Mrs. St. Aubyn, let us lay them to our hearts, and life will have few overpowering griefs for either of us."

"Life for you, my love," said Mrs. St. Aubyn, "is but just begun; for me it is well nigh ended: yet as both disciples in the school of affliction, as both walking in the same path, we may each learn something from the other.

"You have given me to-night, Matilda, more comfort than for a long, long time, I have suffered myself to receive; for I have flown from these things which, after all, will pursue and overtake us, however we seek to escape from considering them. And I shall, one day, have a lesson to give to you, but perhaps not yet," she proceeded with less solemnity, observing Matilda's anxious gaze; "perhaps not yet—I thought of my death-bed as not far distant—but God's will be done!" and she led the way homewards, speaking no more till they arrived within the precincts of the town, by which time she had regained nearly her usual state of composure.

CHAPTER X.

Mrs. St. Aubyn did not again revert to the conversation we have just related ; her mind appeared to Matilda to be absorbed in some ideas which she wished not to discuss with another, but to meditate upon in silence and solitude. In a few days from the period we spoke of in the last chapter, Mr. St. Aubyn came down, bringing with him a letter from Charles, desiring Matilda's speedy return. Her anxiety to know what he was doing, of which, in all his communications since their parting, he had given but very brief and obscure hints, made her willing to avail herself of this summons, and on the following day she prepared to obey it. Her situation at parting with such friends as Mrs. St. Aubyn and her son, was indeed a very painful one ; going, as she too surely felt she was, to encounter a tide of trouble, which it was her fate to stem alone, for from her husband she had no aid to expect. This division of feeling and sentiment between them was the great source of all her misery, and constituted for her that species of sorrow, which in the catalogue of human evils is doubtless the greatest, a marriage unblest with mutual respect and esteem; all other griefs have some alleviation, but this has none, unless when brought to that extremity which separates the ill-

assorted pair. To this extremity Matilda believed she could have died before she had yielded. Her marriage vow was registered in her heart, and to respect it formed the most sacred of her duties. It was this strong principle which made her so tenacious of the character of her deluded husband, that in all her intercourse with Mrs. St. Aubyn his name had never been uttered with any word of bitterness. It was not difficult indeed to perceive that the St. Aubyns beheld his conduct with great disapprobation; but the shield of protection which Matilda had thrown around him, in her firm adherence to her duty, caused him in her presence to be spoken of always with compassion. But silent as she was upon the nature of her sufferings, no disguise could conceal the deep disappointment which was preying upon her heart; and had she poured forth the most minute account of all that was passing in her mind, Mrs. St. Aubyn could not better have understood it than from the few words which in parting broke from her, as it were involuntarily:—

"God bless you, my dear Mrs. St. Aubyn; and if ever again I seem to be neglectful of you, do not believe that I am so. Recollect that I cannot always"—

But fearful of herself—fearful that nature would have her way, and that she must throw herself upon the sympathetic bosom of her friend, and say at once, "recollect that I am the most wretched of wives, and forgive me every offence I may seem to commit against you;" fearful that some such burst of anguish would escape her, she turned from her to take the farewel of Mr. St. Aubyn; but when she

saw the tears standing in his eye, her own could not be repressed.

"Good, dear friends," she said, "oh, spare me—do not"—she would have besought them not to grieve for her, but to believe that she had in all her trials, a support sufficient to bring her triumphantly through them; but words were denied her, and she could only press the hands of both of them.

"You will let us hear from you," said Mr. St. Aubyn; "you will write to my mother," as he led her off to the coach which waited for her at the door; "and remember that you have always a friend"—he could add no more. Matilda would not be denied his hand; she pressed it in silent gratitude; and he said no more, but handing her in, she was in a few moments on her way to town.

On arriving there she was met by Charles, much recovered in spirits, and pretty much the same volatile personage as ever, as his first greeting sufficed to announce.

"Well, Matty, my dear!—what, all alone!—no *compagnon de voyage!*—Well, my girl, how are ye?" he continued, drawing her aside to give her a kiss; "oh, I've got the prettiest apartments for you, you will be delighted with them. Close by the Hunters. —Oh! what do you think?—We are going to have the private play on Friday. Egad, we shall have precious fun! But where is all your tackle? I will go and see after it;" saying which he departed, and Matilda, hopeless and wretched, sat down in the coach-office to compose her thoughts, and try to regain as much appearance of satisfaction, as should

make her, at all events, *seem* glad to find him so exceedingly free from care.

In a few minutes he returned, and told her all was ready: and she accompanied him in a coach to her new abode, which, in point of appearance, justified what he had said in its praise.

So well assured was she of not hearing any thing satisfactory about his future designs, that she did not on that evening, interrupt his evident disinclination to say any thing about them. But on the following morning, she conceived it would be desirable to learn something upon the subject, she therefore hazarded a few inquiries.

"Every thing would be settled, very shortly," he told her. "Hunter was indebted to him, and so were other persons; and, when their accounts were settled, he should arrange all his affairs very comfortably. In the meanwhile he did not want for money, though Belgrave had behaved so shabby.

"By the way, Matilda, what do you think I did the other day?"

Matilda could not imagine.

"But I fear it was something very wrong, Charles," she said, "by the manner in which you introduce it. I hope it was no affront to Mr. Belgrave," she continued gravely.

"Oh dear, no!—no affront!—on the contrary, it was the civilest thing in the world. I found he had been making innumerable inquiries after me, and I thought he was distressed to know how I did; so, as soon as you were gone to Brighton, I hired the smartest tilbury I could find, and ran down to Wim-

bledon to give him a call, to thank him and your good mother for all favours."

"You did not, Charles, I hope!" exclaimed Matilda. "How could you be so imprudent? Is this the way to make friends?"

"Oh, d—m such friends!" he replied eagerly. "I only wish I had found either of them at home. I would have given them my opinion of their friendship."

"You did not find them at home then," she said.

"No, they were gone out. But I had prepared a card: I bought a pack, indeed, on purpose. Just such as the women send out after a confinement."

"*Mr. Charles Harcourt returns thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Belgrave for the honour of their obliging inquiries.*"

"Oh, Charles, how could you!" said Matilda in real distress.

"How could I? Why, child, nothing was more proper. You make yourself out quite a novice in etiquette."

Nothing could be said with advantage, so Matilda remained silent, only feeling, as she had occasion to do every hour in the day, that a woman has a better chance of happiness with a man possessed of almost any fault than that of levity.

It was in vain then, at present, to pursue the intention she had formed of going to visit her mother for a day, and informing her, as it appeared to her she ought to do, of her present situation.

She could imagine, after such an insult on the part of her husband, what would be her reception.

But that she might acquit herself from appearing

to participate in it, she wrote her a circumstantial account of all that had befallen her since they parted.

The day on which the private play was to be performed was the succeeding one. Matilda literally recoiled from the thought of attending it. But all her opposition was met by Charles with a strain of raillery she was quite unequal to answer.

"Upon my soul, Matty," said he to her on the morning of the day on which it was to take place, "I believe you would like to live in a charnel-house, all among skeletons and bones; for such a delight in all that is melancholy never did any body on this side of four score possess. Now, what, in the name of all that is rational, is to prevent our going to the private play to-night with the Hunters?"

"If we take it in a rational point of view," she replied, "much, I think, may be brought forward to prevent it. We are known to be in embarrassed circumstances; and surely it would be more becoming in us to be living quietly, and to be as little seen in company as possible, while we are thus situated."

"And where would there be any society brought together," he replied, "if every body was to keep at home, who is in what you call embarrassed circumstances? The time for going out, child, is when you are in trouble. When you are happy, you may stay at home and enjoy yourself. Do you suppose that half the people you will see to night, (for you *will* see them, as I shall insist upon your going)—do you suppose, I say, that half of them are not just as much embarrassed as I am? There's Hunter himself, for all his fine equipage, and plate, and servants, and all that, he told me this morning, when I just urged him

about that annuity he engaged me in, that he was so bothered with unexpected failures amongst his connexions here and there, that he was at the present time pretty nearly as badly off as I am myself. But what does he do?—Not sit down and cry and lament, as if ill-fortune was to go on for ever. No, he does as wise men and women should always do—run away from sorrow, and jump at every pleasure that comes in his way."

Matilda had nothing to say—words were idle. She suffered him to accept her silence as acquiescence; and, as the shortest method of disposing of the matter, she accompanied him, as he requested she would, to dine at Mr. Hunter's, preparatory to going with them in the evening to the private theatre, at which the tragedy, which had been in frequent rehearsal, was finally to be performed.

They were particularly desired to be at Mr. Hunter's an hour before dinner, that the last arrangements might be completed, when they were altogether; Charles officiating amongst them in the capacity of prompter.

At the appointed time, therefore, they repaired there, and were received by Mr. Hunter with a countenance, which betokened nothing of the embarrassment Charles had told Matilda he was (like himself) involved in; but, on the contrary, it was covered with smiles.

"We have been in great perplexity all the morning," he said, "on account of Othello's obstinacy respecting his complexion; and a prodigious deal of argument it has occasioned."

"Why, he could not possibly be otherwise than black," replied Charles.

"He hesitated about it a great while, I can assure you," said Mr. Hunter. "He insisted upon it that the least tinge of *tawny* would be quite sufficient to mark the character. But Arabella, who has all Shakspeare by heart, and would play Othello a great deal better than he can, declares that Othello was a blackamoor to all intents and purposes."

"To be sure," said Charles; "none but a fool could dispute that."

"But that poor Walton is, you know," replied Mr. Hunter; "and, therefore, he did dispute it. However, eventually, Arabella has carried the point, and she has mixed him up a wash, which she assures him is just the right thing; though I believe, upon my life, it is ten times blacker than any blackamoor that ever was seen."

Matilda, who had taken no part in the matter hitherto, unwilling to seem sullen or indifferent, inquired who took the character of Desdemona.

"Oh, they have got Miss B—— from Covent-Garden for that part," replied Mr. Hunter. "Iago and Cassio are to be performed by young Harley and William Escott: in short, they have arranged all the affair, and entertain expectations of prodigious success. But I am afraid to say too much about it, as between you and me, Mrs. Harcourt, I rather anticipate a failure."

Matilda had no scruple in anticipating so too; and could only suppose, in secret, that, by turning the tragedy into a farce, they would make it amusing if they made nothing else of it.

Mr. Hunter now conducted them up stairs, and was going to usher them into the drawing-room ; but on trying to open the door, he found it locked upon him, though a prodigious ranting from within betokened no desire of secresy on the part of its inhabitants.

"Hark! it's Walton rehearsing, as sure as I'm alive!" said Mr. Hunter in a whisper to Matilda, "and there's little Miss B——, dont you hear her?"

And, sure enough, there was no manner of difficulty in distinguishing the rather angry tones of a female voice, exclaiming,—

"Upon my word, sir—indeed—sir—it is quite impossible I can act with you. You are thinking only of your own performance—you don't play up to me at all," and his irritated replies,

"Surely, ma'am, you are too fastidious. I am persuaded I am right—Kean is my authority."

"Kean, sir—I don't mind what Kean does—I have played with John Kemble."

At this moment the door opened, and Miss Arabella, with her handkerchief held up to her mouth to stifle a violent burst of laughter, made her appearance, signifying to them, by her uplifted finger, not to speak, and beckoning to them to accompany her down stairs.

As soon as they arrived in the dining-room, "I shall certainly die!" she exclaimed, throwing herself into a chair, and still laughing vehemently.—"This tragedy will be the death of me, that's certain; for, what with the bickerings of Othello and Desdemona, and the stupidity of Iago and Cassio, I lead such a life as is perfectly terrible."

"You seem to find it amusing, however," observed Matilda.

Before Arabella could reply, Mr. Walton, the hero of the story, accompanied by Michael Cassio and Iago, having finished the rehearsal, entered the room; and she then immediately composed her features, and assumed a very grave deportment.

He came for the purpose of finally deciding upon the costume of Othello—a point that seemed to have been much argued upon before Matilda arrived.

"I cannot be brought over to your opinion, Miss Arabella," he said as soon as he had paid the compliment of greeting to Charles and Matilda; "I *cannot* agree with you about the sandals, though I admit that Kean dresses the character so. Boots are more proper—and boots, therefore, I will wear."

"You may depend upon it you are quite wrong," replied Arabella, carelessly; "I will appeal to any one whether the sandals that Kean wears are not much more elegant, more *classical,* than to be clattering over the stage in a pair of brass-heeled Hessian boots. Don't you think so, Mrs. Harcourt? Doubtless you have seen Kean in Othello?"

Matilda had; but considering the present not to be the most favourable moment for delivering her sentiments, either as to his acting or his dress, she judiciously declined giving any opinion.

"It is scarcely *generous*, I think, Miss Arabella," said Mr. Walton, "to be saying so much about Kean, and to be asking every body if they have seen Kean in Othello. We all know that I am not Kean."

"Certainly we do know that," replied Arabella,

quite incapable of concealing a smile; which Mr. Walton no sooner perceived than he angrily replied,

"Well, if you mean to do nothing but laugh at us, you had better pay us the preferable compliment of staying at home."

In this opinion Cassio and Iago both joined.

"Upon my word, I don't laugh—you quite mistake me," she quickly replied, alarmed at the idea of his throwing up the affair altogether. "I wish to do all I can to help you. Come, shall I pin you up your turban?"

"Miss Hunter has it," replied he, very gloomily.

"Oh, I will send for it then," said Arabella, ringing the bell; but as she spoke, Miss Hunter entered with a very elegant shawl hanging upon her arm.

Having paid her respects to the newly arrived guests, she turned to her sister, and inquired how every thing was proceeding.

"Oh, exceedingly well," said Arabella; "we only waited for that shawl, which you have so opportunely brought us."

"Now, Walton," and she turned to him, "just sit down here."

A command which, after slight hesitation, he rather sullenly obeyed. But to have so important a part of his attire adjusted in the most becoming manner to his visage, was a matter of too much consequence to be trifled with; so he yielded to Miss Arabella's request, and she proceeded to decorate him, with a countenance, in which mirth so violently struggled for ascendancy over an assumed gravity of demeanour, that Charles, quite incapable of re-

straining his laughter, rushed out of the room, and was speedily followed by Mr. Hunter.

Matilda, not much disposed for merriment, kept her countenance without any difficulty; and the ceremony proceeded, with an occasional remark from Miss Hunter as to the most becoming disposition of this or that fold of the turban; to all of which Othello listened with as much attention and inclination to benefit by her judgment, as if the fate of the whole concern depended upon the style of his head-dress.

During this interval, Iago and Michael Cassio cast several very suspicious glances upon the sisters; probably suspecting that some league of ridicule had been struck between them; the disloyalty of Miss Arabella to the cause, seeming to be scarcely doubtful to the whole party; though all of them, privately aware of their own profound ignorance, were willing to pay some deference to her taste in theatrical business.

Matilda's principal astonishment was, to see the earnestness with which the affair was carried on; and that so many persons should concur in making themselves ridiculous, without manifesting any consciousness of their folly. But their faculties of discernment were employed upon each other, not upon their own instance. There was not one amongst them who expected otherwise than that it would turn out badly: not because he himself was unequal to what he undertook, but because his friend was incapable of performing well. So difficult it is "to see ourselves as others see us."

Othello's toilette eventually concluded pretty well to his satisfaction, and every one of the party, on be-

ing appealed to for their opinion, pronouncing his head to be quite the proper thing, he gradually recovered his good humour; and, by the time they were summoned to the dinner-table, all parties were in a state of complacency towards each other.

They found, in the dining-room, Charles and Mr. Hunter, with very orderly faces, and also Mr. Danvers, Matilda's very civil friend the last time she visited at Mr. Hunter's. This gentleman covered his satirical propensities so dexterously, that a very rigid observer of human nature might have passed him over as possessing, in reality, all the simplicity and good-nature he endeavoured to assume. It was without the slightest degree of alarm, therefore, that the *dramatis personæ*, who were not, individually or collectively, very acute people, observed him of their party. They all returned his cordial shake of the hand with great glee, and began to relate to him, with the utmost *naïveté*, the different doubts, hopes, and fears, with which the undertaking had been accompanied.

CHAPTER XI.

The whole of the conversation, both at and after dinner, turned, as might have been expected, upon nothing but the business of the evening. Mr. Hunter gave all the encouragement possible to the performers, by making libations to their success, in which Michael Cassio so freely joined, that Mr. Danvers observed to Matilda, he probably designed to anticipate the intentions of Iago, and make himself ready intoxicated to his hands.

"Or possibly," he continued, (and such, indeed, was the fact) "he feels, as the hour advances, that like Bob Acres, his courage is oozing out at his fingers' ends, and he takes this method of 'screwing it to the sticking place.'"

As it was expected that the play would take up rather more time than usual in the representation, it was decided that it should commence precisely at seven o'clock.

Accordingly, at that hour, such of the party as composed only the audience, proceeded to the private theatre in —— Street. Here they found the greater part of the spectators assembled, to the number of about a hundred and fifty; the performers, desirous of sparing themselves the dishonour of exhibiting to empty benches, having invited their

friends, and their friends' friends in every direction —to come and have a laugh at their expense. Such were not, perhaps, the precise words of the invitation; but, by the arch smile which accompanied the greeting of the visitors, the watching amongst each other for some word or look, as a signal that restraint might be laid aside and the flood-gates of ridicule safely unlocked, it was easy to perceive that the malice of human nature anticipated to itself a fund of amusement.

Matilda having neither husband, brother, nor cousin, who was going to make a simpleton of himself, had as lawful a right to laugh as any body there; and, it being a faculty which she had lately had but small opportunity of indulging, she did not quite recoil from the possibility of having it a little excited.

But as to prepare one's-self to laugh or to cry, is generally the prelude to disappointment—matter for mirth, or melancholy, or any thing else, never coming when it is expected—it appeared as if the audience had been rather premature in their hopes of fun, when the first act passed over with a mawkish mediocrity insufferable to behold.

The minor characters of the play were supported by some gentlemen who were kept for the "*heavy business*" at the great public theatres; and who, bad as they were in their own proper places, happened unfortunately, on the present occasion, to be the best of the party; and, by their acting, considerably overshadowed those more important personages, Othello, Iago, and Michael Cassio.

A very pretty affected Desdemona, laughing rather more visibly than was quite proper, and treating her Lord Othello with the most ineffable disdain, and a magnificent looking Emilia, also from a public theatre, completed the dramatic corps.

In the second act affairs took a turn, and Michael Cassio, who was now something more than tipsy, began to want the aid of the prompter.

He had raved pretty well, and told with violence enough to deafen any body, how that

> "Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds,
> The gutter'd rocks, and congregated sands,
> Traitors ensteep'd to clog the guiltless keel,
> As having sense of beauty, do omit
> Their mortal natures, letting go safely by
> The divine Desdemona;"

and had greeted that fair one with a hearty shake of the hand, and a

> "Hail to thee, lady! and the grace of Heav'n
> Before, behind thee, and on every hand,
> Enwheel thee round;"—

Having fired off which piece of eloquence, he had said his all, and had nothing further to advance when it most behoved him to speak.

Twice had Desdemona inquired,

> "What tidings can you tell me of my Lord?"

and twice had the valiant Cassio looked to the prompter for intelligence, but in vain; not being on the same side, he could but indistinctly hear him; so, as the case was desperate, he thought any an-

swer was better than none, and ventured simply to reply,

"He's well!"

The prompter's hasty suggestion,

"Not yet arriv'd, nor know I aught,"—

was now very audible, as well as the ill suppressed laughter of Miss Arabella Hunter, between whom and Mr. Danvers, Matilda occupied a seat.

Before them, to her great alarm, sat divers cousins and sisters, headed by the mother of Michael Cassio; all of whom, at every titter of Miss Arabella's, turned round and looked upon her and Matilda with most appalling countenances; though the latter, in her great consideration for the feelings of every person, as soon as she understood their consanguinity to the unfortunate and most ridiculous Cassio, would not move a muscle of her face in derision of him, however strongly excited to it.

That personage, still in the dark as to the prompter's words, began to lose all patience, and hastily walking over to his side, he inquired with much irritation, "*What* is it then?" This movement excited a general laugh in the audience, which the angry glances of his kindred, and the charitable applause and *bravos* of a few of the spectators, could hardly quell.

Cassio, however stood his ground pretty well; and soon being relieved by the dialogue between tween Iago and Desdemona, his blunder passed off without much interruption to the business.

In act the third Matilda rather sorrowfully prepared herself to witness the dreadful slaughter of that fine scene between Iago and Othello, in which the former with matchless skill begins to work upon the jealous passions of the Moor.

And murder enough there was, to all intents and purposes, of fine impassioned sentiments, which were repeated on both sides by rote, after the same manner as one sometimes hears in the streets the minuets of Ariadne and Berenice ground out of a barrel organ.

There was here a good deal of play for the Hessian boots of Othello, who seemed to consider that mental agitation lay principally in the heels: for invariably as his feelings were moved he moved also, and passed to the other side of the stage, and made his speech, and then came back and made another, talking at the end of every turn, and making his gesticulations as regular as the pendulum of a clock.

Not having had a fair occasion of shewing off all his forces whilst Iago remained, the interest being pretty well divided between them, he took the first opportunity of that worthy's absence, in the soliloquy he was left to make, of giving some specimen of them, particularly of his powers in the pathetic line.

But the risible faculties of Arabella were not to be kept under any control, when Othello, calling up a most rueful countenance, had exclaimed

"Haply that I am black,"—

and Mr. Danvers had whispered her

"Black enough in all conscience, you took care of that."

Cassio's mother now openly taxed her with very ill behaviour, implicating Mr. Danvers in the accusation, and not very gently telling them that "they had both better go to the end of the theatre, or out of it, if they did not know how to conduct themselves properly."

Arabella then composed her face, and for a little while was tolerably tranquil, till Iago, a gentleman no otherwise celebrated than by possessing a rich cockney dialect, in which the letter *H* was shuffled into every possible direction but the right, again made his appearance.

He came to talk about that "*ankerchief*" that Desmona had just dropt.

Upon which Emilia, wickedly intent upon keeping up the joke, retorted his words in the same style of pronunciation, repeating with a malicious smile,

"What andkerchief?"

"Why, that same andkerchief the Moor first gave
To Desdemona."

Hereupon Arabella declaring that flesh and blood could endure it no longer, and that it was martyrdom not to be suffered to laugh, desired Mr. Danvers to take her to the end of the theatre, where she might indulge her mirth unrestrained.

Matilda hoped now to escape the suspicious looks of the party before her, who certainly implicated her with the other offenders; and feeling truly tired

with the repetion of the same vulgarisms, and the tedious, monotonous manner in which every scene was spun out to twice its usual length of representation, she began to heave many aspirations after returning home; and could she have escaped without displeasing Charles, she would have undoubtedly made some efforts towards effecting her retreat.

But she had nothing left for it but to wait patiently for the *denouement*, which towards midnight began to approach.

Michael Cassio was already disposed of, rather sooner in fact than he ought to have been; but the truth was, that what with "wine and wassail," that gentleman was not in a state to be produced during any part of the fifth act.

All, therefore, that remained to be said or done by him (which was indeed but little,) was undertaken by a kind hearted friend, who having first performed the more useful part of undressing him, and putting him to bed, arrayed himself in his garments, and with the aid of the prompter went through the character creditably.

At last Matilda had the satisfaction of seeing decided symptoms of the approaching catastrophe. Desdemona was asleep in very good earnest, she had no doubt; and Othello, with his candle in one hand, and his drawn sword in the other, was looking very terrible and full of murder.

For the better enjoyment of this scene, Arabella, accompanied by Mr. Danvers, returned from her hiding-place, and both of them very demurely and respectfully cautious of not making the least noise, reseated themselves by Matilda. Mr. Danvers had

very benevolently equipped Othello with some of his accoutrements, particularly the dreadful naked sword he was then brandishing about: whether this circumstance especially excited him to gaze upon him, or from whatever cause it arose, so earnest was his attention whilst Othello was measuring out his words, so slowly that they might without any difficulty have been counted as he went along, that Matilda almost believed, though it appeared impossible, that Mr. Danvers really found some interest in the matter.

But he soon betrayed unequivocal symptoms of malice towards the unfortunate Othello, who was doomed to have no friend, a truth which he himself began to surmise, when a very loud whisper, and a stifled giggling, as he was in the very centre of

> "It is the cause—it is the cause,"—

distinctly reached his ears.

"For heaven's sake, do be quiet," whispered Arabella to Mr. Danvers, almost choaking herself with her pocket handkerchief, as he leant over to say to her, when Othello very pathetically exclaimed

> "Oh! balmy breath, that doth almost persuade
> Justice to break her sword;"

"No, no—by no means! pray, Miss Arabella, beg of him not to think of it—it's the only one I've got."

Othello looked round very furiously, and appeared

to be on the point of renouncing the whole concern, and walking off in a rage; but after the pause of a few moments he satisfied himself with directing some glances of superlative scorn towards the corner where Arabella sat (who was the marked delinquent by most of the audience,) and then went to take his last kisses of Desdemona.

"One more—one more"—said he, and at every repetition, his wicked wife, either afraid of the lamp-black and oil, or probably in league with some of the scorners, and willing to do her part towards making the thing as ridiculous as possible, moved off farther and farther, till she was quite out of his reach.

But Othello had still to take

"One more, and that's the last;"—

which ceremony he performed by no means adroitly; but putting himself into a very great passion—not wholly without reason, considering the many mortifications that had been heaped upon him—he pursued Desdemona so angrily, and with such incautious violence, that the extempore couch suddenly gave way with a horrible crash, and precipitated both parties to the ground.

This was carrying the joke a step farther than Desdemona intended; for though she had all the inclination in the world to help Othello in a reasonable way to make himself absurd, she never expected to be a joint object of the merriment he was to produce.

Looking the personification of contempt and anger, she stood till the hurly-burly amongst the au-

dience was a little composed, which truth to say, was just then extreme, made up as it was of various expressions of feeling; the humane silencing the malicious with cries of "shame, shame!—silence!"—the compassionate clapping with all their might and main, and screaming out "go on—go on—never mind"—and the wicked, like Arabella Hunter, laughing till the tears ran down their cheeks.

In this interval the wreck of the ill-fated couch was cleared off, and Desdemona at last prevailed upon to sit down and be killed in a large easy chair, which had in the first instance been placed for the accommodation of Emilia to die in: but who, as a secondary person, was now directed to depart in an ordinary manner upon the floor.

Matters thus accomodated, Othello proceeded to business, and most villainously indeed murdered his lady, and was not very much indisposed to do the same thing by two or three more, so filled was he with genuine wrath. In fact, the whole company of amateurs, with the exception of the first Michael Cassio, whose well-timed retreat had spared him a good deal of discomfiture, were very full of ire against each other—every one of them, to a man, laying the quantity of blame which appeared to exist, not upon his own individual conceit which led him to undertake what he was wholly unqualified to perform, but upon some body else—which somebody else retorted upon some other body; and so the reproach went round, disclaimed by all, but properly belonging to every body. In one decision they all, however, internally agreed, that this should be their last appearance in public: and not in any part of his

performance had such energy burst forth as when Iago declared,

"From this time forth, I never will speak word."

Great truth and correctness of acting was likewise unconsciously exhibited, on the part of Othello, in his exclamation,

"O fool, fool, fool!"

particularly as disdaining the matchless burst of genius, the volume of expression with which Kean delivers those words, hurrying them over, as conscious, but deeply ashamed of having been so grossly duped, our present hero, with a solemnity perhaps more judiciously adapted to the very great truth he was uttering, repeated the epithet as a music-master counts triple time—one, two, three: thus impressing it, as it were, more deeply upon the hearts and minds of his hearers.

Mr. Danvers, whose chief delight appeared to consist in looking as immoveable and silent as a statue, at the same time that, by quaint insinuations and remarks, he was slyly working up the mirth of Arabella Hunter, could not, upon any account, permit the parting speech of the hapless Othello to pass off without comment.

"Now, Miss Arabella, I beg that you will remember *that*," said he, when Othello made it a request to his friends,

"When you shall these unlucky deeds relate
Speak of me as I am;"—

And Othello himself very intelligibly addressed her as an offender with a glance of his eye, as he proceeded in a raised voice, and with much emphasis;

" Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in *malice.*"

The last word given in a most decisive and audible tone.

Then must you speak," he continued, relapsing into the pathetic,

" Of one that lov'd not wisely,"—

" Not very, indeed, I must say," whispered Mr. Danvers;

" ..... but too well;"—

" What do you say to that, Miss Arabella?" he continued—

" Of one, whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unus'd to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum."

" Where is your handkerchief, Ma'am?" said he to Matilda, gravely putting his own to his eyes, and keeping it there till Othello and his Hessian boots had fallen to the ground with a great concussion: he then removed it, with a deep sigh, declaring that Othello, of all Shakspeare'a tragedies, was the most affecting to behold; appealing to Matilda, to know if she were not of the same opinion.

But she had so temperately withheld her judg ment during the whole evening, that she determine not to venture any opinion upon the matter now ; ex tremely happy that it was at last brought to a close and hailing as the signal of her own exit the retur of Charles, who now came towards them, laughing and declaring himself to be worn out in his service to the cause, and perfectly exhausted with the pro digious merriment it had afforded him. Late as i was, poor Matilda had still to endure the sitting ou of a supper, which Mr. Hunter gave to such of th company as chose to partake of it ; amongst whic Charles, who always rejoiced in good fellowship, wa certainly to be numbered.

CHAPTER XII.

To dwell upon the present period of our narrative would be to present to our readers a page of domes tic history of too frequent occurrence indeed, we fear but which, in the detail of broken resolutions, per petual misconduct, and the inveteracy of perniciou habits it comprises, is one we are glad to glance ove as quickly as possible.

We will not therefore minutely specify the manne in which Charles and the faithful partner of his mis fortunes, for a few months longer, contrived to evad the positive distress in which his misguided pursuit daily threatened to involve them.

Mrs. St. Aubyn and her son were still absent from London, at the sea-side; and repelled by the cold selfishness of Mr. Belgrave and her mother, from seeking at their hands any kind offices, Matilda was now as wholly desolate, as a being without one friend near can possibly be said to be.

And thus desolate she was, when every day that rose upon her, brought with it accumulated distress —increasing horror—for with nothing less than horror did she witness the rapid strides with which her wretched husband was advancing towards destruction. The most degrading habits were daily becoming more confirmed in him.—A constant wanderer from his home, he passed his hours in any society that offered him a rescue from himself;—generally with unhappy creatures who, like him, were glad to drown reflection in wine, and who took their desperate fortunes to the gaming table, in the forlorn hope of making them better. In this state of trial the tears and prayers of poor Matilda were all she could give; and neither were spared—nor were they always ineffectual. Charles vacillated with all the indecision of a man whose mind is under the dominion of vice, but still not wholly lost to virtuous feeling. He would often clasp her to his heart, and vow that he loved her better than any thing in the world, and that he would immediately adopt a better course. He was not yet so utterly abandoned as not to feel remorse in witnessing the anguish he occasioned her. He was not yet beyond that stage of compunction, which taught him occasionally to experience,

in the words of one of the most powerful poets of the present day.

..... " How sharp the pain,
Our vice, ourselves, our habits to disdain!
To go where never yet in peace we went;
To feel our hearts can bleed, but not relent;
To sigh, yet not recede; to grieve, yet not repent!"

But what is feeling—what is understanding—what are talents, when not united to conduct—or, which is nearly synonymous, to common sense? The meanest mechanic, the poorest labourer, the peasant that can neither read nor write, but who acts upon the plain principles of prudence, and keeps a steady course because he knows the consequences of misconduct, is, to all the intents and purposes of life, a more manly, a more independent, a more exalted character, than is the slave of passion, however well informed, well educated, and well accomplished.

The most favourite resort of Charles had been, till very lately, Mr. Hunter's house; and though every thing that went forward there was in total opposition to her taste or principles, so much worse, as she judged from its effects, was every other society he frequented, that Matilda derived a melancholy satisfaction in hearing him say, when he went out, that he was going there.

But for the last fortnight he had not, to her knowledge, been in Mr. Hunter's house. The cause for so unusual an estrangement she did not like to inquire; as so painful was it now to her to interfere, without any hope of influencing him in his affairs,

that she suffered them to take their course; satisfied to do her utmost quietly and silently to preserve them from total ruin. Various had been the transactions between Charles and Mr. Hunter, in the way of borrowing and lending, since they first became acquainted; the present state of things, as she had long since understood from Charles, left him a creditor of Mr. Hunter's to the amount of two hundred pounds; and as Charles had several times hinted to her a wish that it could be repaid, she supposed that some coolness might have arisen between them upon that point.

In her own secret opinion, though Charles, she well knew, would have severely reproved her for uncharitableness had she expressed it, the moment she heard there was any demur on the side of Mr. Hunter about repaying the money, she concluded it to be wholly lost.

Though as little addicted to judging hastily as most people, she had not been long in habits of familiarity with that gentleman, without forming a pretty just estimate of his character. He was so well acquainted with all the tricks and turns of cunning, but at the same time so dexterous in covering his own motives with an appearance of the most careless indifference, which gave him, to a superficial observer like Charles, the semblance of the most honest, straight-forward creature in the universe,—he was so, what, in the common phrase, is called "*up to every thing*," but also apparently so disinterested in affording to others the benefit of his knowledge and experience in life, by guarding them against suspected characters, that, although it might seem dif-

ficult to believe that he had not every one's welfare at heart more than his own, and Charles affirmed this to be the leading trait of his disposition. Matilda could not be persuaded but that he was one of those persons who live upon the ruin they have (under the mask of friendship) assisted to make.

She was not, therefore, in any degree surprised, when Charles, hesitating and confused, as conscious that, had he followed her counsel, he would have had no such confession to make, acknowledged that he began to fear he was deceived in Mr. Hunter; who, knowing his present distressed situation, still kept him in want of the money he was indebted to him, thus driving him to the degradation of dunning him—"for dun him I must, Matty," he continued, "and that this very day, or to prison I must go."

She sighed heavily, but said nothing, and Charles proceeded:

"If I can get that two hundred pounds, I will pay Hodson, who has threatened me with an arrest these two months, and then, Matty—"

"What then, Charles?" and she gave him a melancholy smile.

"I will take the remainder, and go with you to the sea-side, and join the Willetts; and we will lead a quiet, happy, good life; for, in truth, I am wearied to death of this. Oh, Matilda, you cannot conceive how wretched I am!"

She had heard him make the same avowal too often to be more affected by it than to shake her head in affirmation of her truly believing him.

"So miserable!" continued Charles, dejectedly laying his head upon his hand.

At this repetition of his being in distress, she looked at him pityingly; but shrinking, as he ever did from the discussion of his faults and their consequences, he started up, and saying "he would go to Hunter, now this very moment, before he was out for the day, and talk to him, that he would!" he was gone before she had given utterance to the words of tenderness and gentle remonstrance which hung upon her lips.

Mr. Hunter and Charles had not met for two or three weeks, for reasons which the former better understood than the latter, who rather *suspected* than *knew* that he was shunned by his former friend.

He found him at home, a circumstance which had lately been of rare occurrence. Mr. Hunter received him with the same kindness of words, and with looks that seemed to correspond to the pleasure he expressed at the sight of him.

"You are the very person, Charles," said he, "that I have this moment been thinking of. I am happy in being able immediately to repay you the sum I am indebted to you;" and he took out his pocket-book—but on looking it over, he seemed to be struck with a sudden recollection.

"By the way," said he, "that is well thought of!"

Then turning to Charles, "I find I am a little premature in saying *immediately*," he continued, "though *that* is of little consequence. To morrow I can arrange the matter with you decidedly. But till I saw this memorandum (which reminds me also

of an appointment of the last importance, which I have for to day,) it had quite escaped my memory that, in accommodating Lord B—— the other day with the loan of five hundred pounds, I was obliged to make use of part of the sum I had destined for you; in consequence of which, I am just at this moment unprovided. But that of course will make no difference. To-morrow I shall be exceedingly happy—and in the meanwhile," he continued, with an ironical smile, "let me mitigate the enormity of this prodigious sum;" and he put into the hands of Charles about a fourth part of it.

Had he been guilty of the most paltry, dishonourable action, instead of seeking what was only his own, poor Charles could not have felt more shame, more humiliation, than this sort of raillery heaped upon him. So irresistible is the power of impudence, that it actually seems to have the faculty of transferring the blushes that properly belong to itself, into the face of its victim. Mr. Hunter's method of settling the question was so neat, so exceedingly skilful, that it was not difficult for Charles to suppose him versed in the habit of silencing such claims as his in the same way.

For the first time since they became acquainted, he caught a distinct view of the character in which he had so credulously confided; he thought now that he could read and understand it as well as if he had been perusing a dictionary. But it would have been to inflict a species of torture upon his mind, to descend to an argument upon the occasion. Had he been so disposed, Mr. Hunter gave him no opportunity to attempt any. He took out his watch, and

apologising for his apparent rudeness, "I am going upon very urgent business," said he; "and, by the bye—but, however, I can ask you that as we go along, perhaps you will walk with me?"

Charles saw through him, and certainly despised him; but his company relieved him from his own, and therefore it was preferable.

"I was going to ask you," said Mr. Hunter, with his peculiar smiling carelessness, as soon as they were in the street—"I was going to ask you, Charles, whether you had any fancy to engage in the prettiest little speculation?"

"My speculations," said Charles, interrupting him with a heavy sigh, "are well nigh ended, I believe."

Mr. Hunter looked at him for half a minute, and then broke out into an immoderate fit of laughter.

"Why, what is the meaning of all this?" he inquired. "My dear fellow, have you been talking to a Methodist parson!"

"No," said Charles, pettishly, "there is no need of a Methodist parson to tell me that I am on the brink of ruin."

"The brink of ruin!" repeated Mr. Hunter, still laughing. "*Rouge et noir*, I suppose, has been but an unprofitable business of late—very likely—I often find it so myself. But what then! I don't whine, and call myself upon the brink of ruin. How the devil should a man be on the brink of ruin, who lives in London, and has got a head upon his shoulders!"

"When he has no money in his purse," replied

Charles, "I believe his head will be but of little use to him."

"Aye, no money," replied Mr. Hunter; "I grant you that *no* money makes his case somewhat despeperate. But that is not your case: in fact, my dear fellow, I have the greatest regard for you. You know it—I am not a man of words—I say less than I mean—I know the world *well*—I know the golden opportunities which in this city spring up, and positively court a man's acceptance, if he has but an inclination to avail himself of them. Now this paltry two hundred pounds which I hold of your's you will lose it in a night perhaps—certainly in a week, at the *rouge et noir* table.

Charles knew not how to deny so great a probability. He suspected that Mr. Hunter was going to propose to him to do something with his money which he ought to decline; but he suffered him still to proceed, willing to hear if his broken fortunes had any chance of being benefited; and though shaken in his confidence in Mr. Hunter, still believing that he would advise him according to the best of his judgment, because, as there are many degrees in roguery, he imagined him to be arrived only at that stage of it which leaves a man so much honour that he would *rather not* cheat a friend if he could carry a point without it.

He saw very clearly that he had no chance of seeing his money without such a stir about it as he was not of a disposition to make: he conceived, therefore, that he had no option but to make a virtue of necessity; and by listening to the scheme in which Mr. Hunter recommended him to embark it, learn,

perhaps, some information of the purpose for which that person had alreadydestined it.

The advice he received was, as he supposed it would be, to suffer Mr. Hunter to place it at most exorbitant interest, in adding it to a sum he was about to lend to some needy wretch, who was willing to relieve his necessities by buying money at just double its value.

Charles was still silent: and r. Hunter interpreting his continuing so, as a sign that he assented to what he said, thus went on:

"In short, my dear Harcourt, to be candid with you, I *have* thus appropriated the two hundred pounds I was indebted to you; though in the innumerable transactions of this kind in which I am constantly engaged, I had absolutely forgotten that it was your money I made use of, till on referring to my pocket-book, I saw the memorandum I had made to write to you upon the subject, to say, what indeed I say now, that if you are insane enough (you will pardon the expression, but upon my soul it would be little less than madness,) to forego such an opportunity of improving a sum that is absolutely nothing in itself—but, however, I only advise; if you wish for your money it is yours—any day—any hour in the day—only speak the word."

But Charles could not speak that word; he wanted courage to say that he despised his counsels. He only suggested the pressing nature of his present difficulties; and that perhaps this new adventure might be attended with risk, or at least with delay.

"Delay indeed," replied Mr. Hunter; "no, no—I am up to all these things; I look after people rather

too sharply. The very day, the very hour your interest is due, you have it—depend upon that. But, however, to set your mind quite at ease, the first leisure day I have, we will have some writings drawn up about the business; in the mean time you cannot take much harm—that fifty pounds"—

Charles, ashamed of his supposing he doubted him, here interrupted him to say, "He was not under the least apprehension—he begged no more might be said on the subject."

"No, no," replied Mr. Hunter:—"there is no occasion to say any more. You have done as clever a thing with your money as ever a man did in this world—so now cheer up—there's a good fellow."

He then fell into a strain of conversation but too entertaining to the mind of Charles, always panting to be disengaged from itself.

Their dialogue had passed in St. James's Street, where they had continued walking up and down as they discoursed.

It was now the hour of high 'change in that mart of fashion; and as different equipages and people passed them, he pointed out in the most amusing manner to his companion, the most remarkable characters they contained. He seemed to be versed in the history of every body; and proved satisfactorily enough, as far as words could prove it, that his assertion of knowing the world *well* was founded in fact.

When he had completely dissipated the melancholy of Charles, and had paused with him a little while before the window of the caricature shop; he suddenly took out his watch—"Egad," said he, "in

chatting with you I have quite forgot my appointment, and now its quite too late. Well," and he shrugged his shoulders with great indifference, "people who want money must wait with patience the leisure of those who are to supply them;" and they took another turn down the street.

Charles at length complained of fatigue; adding, that he had not felt well all the morning.

"You do look queer and tired," observed Mr. Hunter; "well, let us twirl in here for a quarter of an hour, and see what they are doing at the *rouge et noir* table."

Charles hesitated a few moments; but to hesitate was to comply—and he followed Mr. Hunter to a place, with all the mysteries of which he was but too well acquainted.

They did not come merely to look on, though Mr. Hunter had spoken as if such had been his simple intention.

He soon threw down his money on the table, calling upon Charles to do the same: a request with which he speedily complied. Interested, excited, occupied, and playing with all his heart and soul, he now felt no fatigue, nor gave a thought to the lapse of time, till Hunter himself roused him, by declaring that *he* must go, and that it was folly in him to pursue ill luck any further; for ill luck, as usual, had been the portion of Charles; and, as usual also, his eagerness to play had risen with the perverseness of fortune.

But Mr. Hunter, who possibly might foresee in his wasting cash a chance of trouble to himself, now vehemently urged his departure; as willing to re-

move him as he had been to bring him into this detestable place. It was not, however, till the deluded Charles had staked and lost his last guinea, that he wandered off in a state of mind which no description could faithfully pourtray.

He left the gambling house alone, for Mr. Hunter had long before retired, well satisfied to find once more in his own possession the greater part of the fifty pounds he had so recently transferred to Charles.

CHAPTER XIII.

All that afternoon Matilda expected the return of her husband, with a tenderness and solicitude, which his heavy misconduct had of late, in some degree, banished.

As long as it was possible to give him her affection she had bestowed it; but when his inveterate irresolution, and continual feebleness of purpose, had robbed him of her respect, it had been only the mild but cold attentions of obedience that her strong principles of duty could enable her to shew him.

But on this day a feeling of compassion revived towards him, excited by the gentleness of her nature, which could never look upon any sorrow without sympathy: and that he was in real sorrow she had never been so truly convinced as she was by the dejection of his tone and manner that morning, when he spoke of being miserable.

She thought, too, on recurring to the recollection of the last few days, that he had looked more than usually ill; for ill, indeed, were now his general looks. A life of dissipation had done its usual work —and haggard cheeks, and hollow eyes, and faded appearance, already began to testify that health, among his many other precious gifts, had been squandered in the pursuit of pleasure.

She thought too that, if not unkind, she had failed to be as affectionate, as solicitous about him, as it was in her nature ever to have been—if he would but have permitted it; and thus taxing, though far too severely, her timid, doubting heart, she waited with anxious fondness the moment of his return—that she might speak to him most tenderly—soothe away the fresh troubles that disturbed him—and prove to him, that whatever might be their number and degree, one faithful friend was still left to him, who would not forsake him, while she had the power to be useful or to be kind.

Thus, having discoursed with her heart, she became disappointed, and vexed at his protracted return.—Not alarmed—for, alas! she was too well acquainted with this manner of passing many a solitary hour, to feel surprise at his continued absence. The dinner she had provided for him with particular attention to his prevailing taste, was taken away, and he returned not—the evening passed, and still he did not arrive. But this was not unusual; and Matilda now not expecting his return till some hour before eight or nine o'clock the next day, retired, with a heavy sigh, to her pillow.

But when eight, and nine, and ten o'clock the next

day did actually arrive, but no Charles, she became a prey to the most anxious alarm. He never had stayed away from home so long before!—He must be in some difficulty—in some danger. Her agitation became extreme. No situation of mental uneasiness is comparable to that of waiting long and anxiously the approach of another, more especially if the expected person be one from whom we recently parted uncomfortably. At such a time imagination has its full play. It is not only every possible evil to have befallen the absent that she represents, but intent upon making torture as complete as possible, she incessantly suggests what our self-reproach and agony will be when the worst is known. That some serious accident had befallen Charles she had thoroughly persuaded herself, when the day advanced and he returned not.

"How unkindly, how inconsiderately have I spoken to him of late!" said she, in the bitterness of self accusation most unjustly accusing herself, who knew not how to speak or act unkindly to any thing that breathed. "No compassion for him," she continued, "none, none!"

But incessant tears interrupted her words, and thus more than another hour elapsed. At the end of that time, she determined to repair to Mr. Hunter's, as the only place in which there was a chance of her hearing any intelligence of him.

On arriving there and inquiring for Mr. Hunter, she was informed he was not within; though the countenance of the servant seemed, she thought, to contradict such an assertion. But she could not return without an attempt at seeing some part of the

family, so she inquired if either of the Miss Hunters could be seen. "I *must* speak to one of them," she said with an earnestness which prevented the negative that otherwise awaited her question.

Miss Hunter, he believed, was upstairs; and he led the way to the drawing room, where that young lady was seated, playing with a little French dog.

She greeted Matilda with a careless "how d'ye do?" and was about to express some wonder at her being so unusually favoured, Matilda never volunteering a visit to that house, but, on the contrary, always avoiding it, when her husband left her an option.

But on perceiving the breathless haste with which she inquired "do you know any thing of Charles?" and observing the agitation of her countenance and manner, she restrained her words, and returned a decisive answer, by assuring her that she had neither seen nor heard any thing of him.

"Has he then been playing truant?" she asked with the utmost indifference.

Matilda made no answer, and she went on to say,

"Alas, that is no uncommon thing for husbands to do; and Charles, I should think, as likely as any of them."

She was proceeding in this strain of raillery, which was, at the present moment, utterly insupportable to Matilda, as hastily, therefore, as she had entered the room, she was departing from it, when Miss Hunter arrested her steps by saying,

"Oh, don't be in such a hurry, Mrs. Harcourt, perhaps my father may know something about him

I will run and ask him: but just let me know how long he has been lost?"

Utterly overpowered by this unseasonable levity, Matilda turned to the window to conceal her tears; upon which Miss Hunter, slightly confused with an idea of having been somewhat unfeeling and abrupt, began to attempt something like an apology.

"I beg your pardon—I really was not aware the matter was so serious."

"If you will be so obliging as to ask Mr. Hunter," Matilda did just articulate, in her earnest desire to get rid of her.

"Oh, certainly—this moment!" returned Miss Hunter, not less anxious to escape; *sentimentalities*, as she called any thing like nature or feeling, being what she most abhorred to encounter.

She was gone, and Matilda, roused into exertion by meeting with this unsympathising conduct, was able to employ the interval of her absence in controlling her emotion, and arming herself with fortitude.

So long a time elapsed before she heard any signal of approaching footsteps, that she was on the point of ringing the bell to ask if Mr. Hunter was likely to appear, when the door opened, and he entered the room.

Taught by her recent interview with the daughter, to expect but little consolation for her anxieties from any part of the family, with a more composed manner she repeated her inquiry if Mr. Hunter could give her any intelligence of Charles.

"I am fearful some accident must have—"

She stopped: for in the penetrating glance of an instant, she saw that Mr. Hunter had some information to communicate.

"My dear Mrs. Harcourt," he began, placing a chair for her as he spoke.

But Matilda, impatiently repelling the hand with which he would have constrained her to sit down, intreated him to be brief.

"You know something of Charles—where is he?—is he safe?"

"Oh, perfectly so," he replied with a slight smile: "I hope you were in no alarm about his personal safety!"

"Indeed I was—so much so that it is quite—"

Her emotion was such, that it was only by her tears she could tell how great was her happiness in hearing that her fears had been groundless.

"Oh, you are too sensitive! too excellent, I should say," continued Mr. Hunter, endeavouring again to take her hand, but relinquishing it on meeting with a repulse.

"But my husband," said Matilda, "I wish only to hear of him. What has happened?—where is he?"

"I lament indeed, my dear Mrs. Harcourt," replied he, in a strain of hypocritical sorrow, "I lament to say, he is where I have long feared his extreme imprudence (you must pardon me the epithet) would eventually place him: he is in the King's Bench."

"In prison!" she repeated, in a tone that bespoke the horror with which she heard these tidings.

Mr. Hunter only replied by a mournful shake of his head.

Matilda checked as much as possible the torrent of conflicting feelings with which she heard this intelligence.

"It could not," he said, "be wholly unexpected, from the desperate state of his fortunes."

Still it came upon her with a shock which the whole strength of her mind scarcely enabled her to resist. The most effectual support she at present received was from the conviction that Mr. Hunter could not care for any part of her sufferings; and under this impression every effort he made to console her served as a stimulus to prompt such conduct as should convince him that she rose superior to those misfortunes which she believed his acquaintance with her husband had tended to accelerate.

"Will you do me the favour to tell me, if you know, how this has happened?" said she, interrupting a profusion of fine sentiment and good wishes for her happiness to which he was giving utterance, while she was struggling to command her voice, and repress her emotion.

"I only know it from a note I this morning received from him," he replied, "informing me what had happened, and requesting to see me there. A request," he proceeded, "which I cannot but think a little extraordinary, considering that it was only yesterday I advanced him such a sum as with common prudence would have"—

"You declined going to him!" Matilda here interrupted him by remarking, with an expression of countenance impossible to be mistaken.

"I could not do otherwise," replied Mr. Hunter; "I felt that it would be"—

But by the time he had arrived thus far in his speech, Matilda had reached the door, to which he followed her, still explaining, if she had been inclined to listen to him. But she now decidedly interrupted him by a "good morning, sir," which effectually prevented his proceeding; and perceiving her determined not to listen to him, he followed her in silence down the stairs, only observing, in taking his leave of her at the hall-door,

"I feel quite convinced, Mrs. Harcourt, that you are judging me unjustly; in which opinion I cannot say this contempt of me gives me so much pain, as under other circumstances it certainly would do."

To this flourish Matilda made no reply, but hastened with all speed home; and when she arrived there, she found the following note from Charles:

"My dearest wife,

"I am not worthy that you should give a moment's thought about me; but if you wish to see me, you know not the comfort your presence will give me. I was yesterday arrested; and not having any friend in town to whom I could apply (for the Willetts are gone out on a tour, and Hunter has proved himself the basest of men,) I chose to be taken to the King's Bench, caring little indeed at that moment what became of me. Here, then, you will find your unfortunate

CHARLES."

Matilda, though she felt as if her heart was pierced with a poignard, had only one desire left, which was to act, to be useful, or as she had sincerely said to herself, to be kind to him.

Without once thinking of herself, or of the privations she must endure, she proceeded instantly to make arrangements for an absence of some time from her present abode; and having settled every thing with this view, she ordered a coach, and proceeded to the King's Bench.

CHAPTER XIV.

THEN indeed, having for a little time nothing to do but think, remembrance came upon her with many a bitter pang, and for a while she wept unconstrained.

"Yet, desolate and degraded as may be my future days," she said, "I *have* a solace, I *have* a friend;" and raising her eyes, she repeated with an energy that composed and comforted her,

> "But, oh! thou bounteous Giver of all good,
> Thou art, of all thy gifts, thyself the crown;
> Give what thou wilt, without thee we are poor;
> And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away."

In the meanwhile the coach proceeded through the suburbs that lead to the melancholy regions towards which she was advancing, and in passing to which the observation of a thoughtful mind is incessantly

excited, by the curious variety of objects it presents, characteristic enough of the wants, follies, misfortunes, and crimes of man. Here a theatre—there a methodist chapel—an asylum for sinners—a receptacle for lunatics—and there they all stand so unheeded!

The first sound that greeted the ears of Matilda, as she entered the gloomy prison, whose high bare walls and dismal palisades might, one would have thought, have excluded the approach of any thing like mirth, were, nevertheless such as indicated cheerful bustle and gaiety.

To all appearance it was a place of amusement. Some were playing at tennis, others walking up and down, engaged in animated conversation. There was not to be seen amongst them half a dozen dejected countenances: a bold, fearless kind of self-consequence distinguished most of them, evidently put on to defy humiliating compassion, but which was miserably contrasted by the plain fact of being in the most pitiable of all situations.

Trembling and agitated, like a bewildered deer pursued by the hunters, Matilda stood appalled as she surveyed the motley group by whom she was surrounded.

Charles had inadvertently forgot to specify the precise spot in this immense place in which she must seek him; and equally incapable of returning or of proceeding, she remained a few minutes doubtful what course to pursue; but she was soon perceived by three or four shabby looking people to be seeking for some one or other, and they all assailed

her at once to know whom she wanted, offering to conduct her before she had mentioned any name.

She directed herself to the most civil and least pressing of the party, and he replying that he knew Mr. Harcourt very well, she followed him up a flight of dirty, narrow stone stairs, to the very top of the building, and then she found herself in a low kind of landing-place, with doors on each side opening upon it, most of them standing ajar, and disclosing the miserable articles of furniture their poor inhabitants could command. Two or three persons came out to stare at them and inquire whom they wanted. Curiosity indeed seemed to be the prevailing passion of the place: probably from its being the only one of which circumstances admitted the gratification.

Matilda soon discovered, what indeed she had mistrusted from the first, that her conductor knew no better where to find Mr. Harcourt than herself; but on again mentioning his name, a woman who was engaged in washing linen at one end of the landing-place, eagerly called out that the gentleman living there, and she pointed to a door, was well acquainted with the residence of all the prisoners, and could tell in a moment in what part of the prison Mr. Harcourt lodged; as he kept for his own amusement a calendar of all fresh arrivals.

They knocked at the specified place, and the door was opened to them, not by "*the gentleman,*" who was taking his walk, they were informed, in the court-yard below, but by his wife, an ordinary looking person, but very civil, who, perceiving from Matilda's looks that she was nearly exhausted with fa-

tigue and emotion, requested her to take a chair, and rest herself in her apartment, whilst her guide, to obviate any further mistakes, went to her husband (whom she pointed out to him from her window, walking amongst innumerable persons in the space below) to obtain from him the information she could not herself give.

Matilda thankfully accepted her offered civility, for she was nearly overpowered with fatigue and over-exerted strength of mind. Her hostess was quiet enough, and pursued her occupation of mending an old coat of her husband's, without molesting her with any discourse; but two other women who were in the room kept up an incessant chattering, mingled with many more questions than Matilda thought it necessary to answer, upon her business in the prison; and, as the door was open, and immediately before it stood the person engaged in washing, and who was a joint occupier with all the rest in this miserable apartment, she also took a part in the conversation.

She seemed to officiate as cook as well as laundress: for she diversified her employment by every now and then coming in to examine a sauce-pan on the fire, containing their dinner, assuring Matilda, as she did so, that these occupations were perfectly new to her, she having, but a very short time before, kept six servants of her own, and been at the head of a very large establishment for public accommodation at a fashionable watering-place.

In all of them there appeared a strong desire of impressing Matilda with a conviction that no faults of their own, but the most unforeseen and unheard-of misfortunes, had occasioned their being placed in

so ignominious a situation. A wretched old woman, with a head shaking with palsy, who was eating bread and cheese and drinking porter, and who told Matilda she had been just *chummed* upon them (that is, had been sent to occupy a part of their room)—this poor creature was mumbling to her an account of a fine house she had recently possessed in Bridge-Street, Blackfriars, and enumerating the carriages her deceased husband had been accustomed to keep; an account which her companions corroborated very earnestly, as if the departed consequence of this miserable being reflected some upon them.

A gentlemanly looking elderly man now approached the door. He was immediately greeted with an acclamation of pleasure from the woman who was washing; and a strain of coarse gaiety ensued between them, by which it appeared that he was a kind of humourist, who now and then visited some one confined in the prison who lodged near them, and had, in the course of his visits, struck up an acquaintance with them.

Matilda was not a little surprised to hear the lady who had kept six servants, and been at the head of a boarding-house at Brighton, ask him to be charitable enough to give her a pound note, or to convert it into a loan; a piece of benevolence, however, which he declined, alleging that he had given her five shillings the last time he was there.

Matilda's guide, to her great satisfaction, at last returned, to tell her he had gained a right direction to Mr. Harcourt, and could conduct her to him without further difficulty.

She therefore took leave of the company round

her, and, as she found that much delicacy was not requisite upon the present occasion, she ventured to offer a memento of her sense of the obligation she had received, which was very joyfully accepted.

As they went along, her conductor informed her that Mr. Harcourt, being but just come in, was not yet accommodated with a room, but was now in the apartment of a person whom he named; "and it was *rather* disagreeable for him poor gentleman," he said, "particularly as he seemed but ill and lowish in spirits, that the person, in whose lodgings he was placed, had the day before lost one of his children, and it made the room *dull-like*."

"Let us hasten on," said Matilda, feeling every moment lost that was not employed in soothing or supporting her husband; "hasten on, I beg of you."

The man did so, and Matilda again followed him to the very top of the building, where he left her at a door which was opened to her, not by Charles, but by a man, who, at the sight of her, bowed, and, turning his head, he beckoned to a young woman who was sitting at work, as summoning her to retire with him, which she did; and Matilda, advancing a few steps, found herself in the presence of her husband. He was leaning his head upon his arms, which were crossed before him on the table; and from the total insensibility he evinced as to her entrance, or the departure of the man and his wife, she could only suppose him to be asleep, and on coming nearer to him, she perceived it was the case.

She did not immediately awaken him: for, almost stupified with the strange variety of objects that surrounded her, she stood to gaze till her spirits

were a little composed, and she could speak to him calmly. She looked round the cell which was now the habitation of a man whom she had seen surrounded with all the elegance, all the luxurious comforts that distinguish the dwellings of wealth! Squalid poverty sat in every nook and corner. A bed with tattered hangings, two or three broken, worm-eaten chairs, a miserable grate containing a handful of fuel, a kettle and saucepan on each side of it, and upon a table that stood by the side of a cradle which contained a living infant, was placed the coffin of a dead one.

Shuddering at the horrors which surrounded her, Matilda felt as if she dared not any longer remain, as it were the only living, breathing thing amongst them. She wished to hear the sound of a voice, and she could not refrain from awakening Charles, but hastening towards him, she laid her hand upon his shoulder, and bending down her head, "I am here, my dear Charles," she said, "speak to me."

He raised his head, and perceiving who it was that stood over him thus pitying and tenderly, he dropt it again upon his burning hands, just uttering her name, but nothing more.

She thought that overpowering shame kept him silent, and restrained him from the power of looking her in the face.

"My dear Charles!" and in the kindest accents she spoke.

He pressed her hand with fervour, but still said nothing. It was after the pause of a minute or two that he spoke.

"Why should we be sorrowful," said he, "Ma-

tilda?—that will do no good. No, let us be cheerful," and he attempted a laugh, which pierced her very heart.

She intreated him to be rational.

"Rational," he replied; "well, nothing is more rational than to bear misfortunes cheerfully."

"Why, Matilda, you look frightened!" he continued, observing the pale gaze of terror with which her countenance was fixed upon him, as if she doubted whether his senses were not affected by his misfortunes.

"Oh, let us go—let us leave this terrible place!" she faintly articulated, casting, as she spoke, a fearful glance upon the dead infant.

"It is a horrid sight!" he replied,—"horrid. But to this I have brought you, Matilda—you, who deserved a palace for your dwelling place; but let us go—yes, we will go—I have ordered another room," —and he attempted to rise—but in vain, he sunk down again in his chair.

"Why, what ails me, I wonder?" he exclaimed; "this is really very—very ridiculous! isn't it, Matty?"

"Pray sit still, Charles," said Matilda, trembling with dread: for she knew not whether to believe him under the influence of delirium or wine; so strange and unaccountable appeared his behaviour.

"Well, I *am* still," he replied, falling back in his chair, as from excessive weakness; "what would you more?—I am all obedience."

"Oh, Charles, how cruel is this conduct!"—and she burst into a flood of tears.

"Matilda," and his voice assumed a softer tone,

"Matilda, dont take offence at me. I feel so very ill —and I am truly unhappy in my heart—whatever I may seem."

"Are you ill, Charles?"—and she looked upon his wan and haggard cheek. "Ah, indeed I see you are; how long have you been suffering?"

"I dont know"—he replied, "at least—but I believe my head wanders a little!" and he pressed his hand to his forehead.

"My dearest Charles!"—exclaimed Matilda, and in a paroxysm of alarm she clasped his hand to her heart; "dont—dont"—she would have said something of comfort, if she could have uttered it, but she could not; she could only raise his drooping head, and press it to her bosom, and seal her lips in token of pity upon his fevered cheek, while she sobbed with anguish.

A long suppressed tempest of emotion at length broke forth from the heart of Charles in such a burst of grief as Matilda could scarcely have believed he would indulge; but his weakened nerves betrayed their feebleness in a torrent of tears which it shocked her to behold. Women weep, for tears seem to be their portion; but in seeing a man subdued by grief, we appear for the first time fully to understand how acute are the sorrows of human nature.

Though so deeply injured by his misconduct—though reduced by it to a situation of the most humiliating description, never had Matilda felt so strongly attached to her husband as at this moment.

The idea of being his only friend, at a time when he stood so much in need of friendship, united her to him in the strongest bonds of affection.

Clearly as benevolent design is to be traced in all the passions and feelings with which human beings are gifted, there is nothing perhaps which more beautifully exemplifies the portion of "the divinity which burns within us," than that disposition to love and serve those who are wholly dependent upon our kindness, which almost invariably springs up in every heart. "*I have none but you to befriend me,*" is a plea which awakens all that is good and benevolent within us, and which generally prompts to the obedience of the precept which, issuing from the lips of Him who knew how often and how deeply his suffering creatures would stand in need of pity, commands us "to love one another."

As tenderly as if he were the most deserving of men, Matilda employed every soothing endearment to compose the sorrows of Charles, and win him from the contemplation of his sad circumstances.

"You dont know, Matilda," he began to say, as soon as he recovered the powers of speaking, "you cannot imagine how infamously Hunter has behaved to me. I wrote to him, begging to see him, for I knew of no one else in town likely to assist me, and here—here is the answer I received,"—and he drew it with a trembling hand from his pocket.

Matilda took it, though with a disgust which made it painful to her to open it, and briefly cast her eye over the following lines:

"Sir—I am rather astonished at your application to me, considering I yesterday advanced you a sum far exceeding what you could reasonably expect to receive from me. You must pardon my saying, I

fear no sum of money would be of essential service to you: and if it were, I regret that it is totally out of my power to advance it.

"Yours, &c.—J. H."

"What do you think of that?" exclaimed Charles.

"I wish not to think of it," she replied. "I wish only to think of removing you into some other apartment, till we can consider what is to be done for your release."

"Nothing can be done for that, Matilda," said he, "all my creditors will soon know, if they do not already, where I am; and if I could get rid of one, the rest would be upon me directly. No, I will take no steps for a release; I am as well here as any where else. I will apply to no one for assistance. Matilda, I charge you, write to no one. But I will not have you remain here. Mrs. St. Aubyn will be glad to receive you."

"I shall remain with you," she quietly but firmly replied.

"God bless you, my dear girl," said he, kissing her several times; "I never deserved such a wife."

His further effusion of self reproach was here interrupted by the entrance of a person employed in the prison, who came to inform him that the apartment allotted to him was ready for his reception.

Again he rose, and with more success than before, was able to walk, though extreme indisposition compelled him to support himself upon Matilda's arm.

Matilda breathed with less oppression as she quitted the melancholy cell in which this interview had passed; and anxious to give as little of wretched-

ness as possible to surrounding circumstances, already dismal enough, she no sooner found herself in what was to be considered as their own apartment, than she set about arranging it, with every attention to the comfort of her husband.

Her first care was to endeavour to prevail upon him to take some repose, which his present situation rendered necessary enough. Indeed she attributed the principal part of his bodily suffering to the circumstance of his having passed the preceding night in so harrassing a manner.

Perfectly exhausted he made no opposition to her request, but throwing himself upon his miserable couch, he endeavoured to gain a short interval of repose.

During this time Matilda revolved in her mind whether or not to disobey his injunction respecting her writing to any of her friends. That she should have the utmost reluctance to apply to Mr. St. Aubyn, was natural enough, considering to how little purpose he had already afforded his assistance; and still more from a feeling of delicacy, which made her revolt from trespassing again upon his kindness; and as to intreating the aid or advice of Mr. Belgrave, she knew very well how fruitless such a request would be; and that in fact to propose it, would only be to draw upon herself the renewal of those proposals she had already declined.

Upon the whole, she believed that for the present her part was to remain quiet and resigned; fulfilling her duty in attention to her husband, and waiting patiently the issue of events. It would not, she knew, be a long time before Mrs. St. Aubyn and her

son returned to town from Brighton: they would seek her at her lodgings, and they would be directed to her present abode: for in the simplicity of her mind she had not for a moment thought of concealing the dwelling to which she was hastening, but had left directions for all letters or inquiries to follow her there.

Calmly and patiently therefore she seated herself in what, though dignified with the name of a room, might more properly have been called a cell.

She looked round it at first with a shudder; but it was only momentary. It was so much better than that in which she had first discovered Charles, that she felt as if she had cause to be thankful in having obtained it.

"And if it were worse than that," she said, "the mind is its own place; and while I have such a consolation as this," and she took into her hand that sacred volume, which she had not failed to bring with her, as well judging, in this scene of sorrow, how much it would be her all, "while I have this comfort," she continued, "I want but little else beside." She began to read, but her attention was so frequently abstracted by the convulsive starting, and indications of pain which the broken slumbers of Charles betrayed, that she found it impossible to fix her thoughts as she could wish.

His moans became almost incessant, and, believing him awake, she hastened to his side.

But he still slept, though with an uneasiness so evident, as almost tempted her to awaken him.

His labouring breast, his burning cheeks and hands, *indicated* excess of fever; and trembling at the pos-

sibility of his being attacked with severe illness in this dreadful place, a horror greater than she had yet experienced took possession of her heart.

"Oh, my good God!" she exclaimed, in the terror of her thoughts, "lay not upon me more than I can bear!"

But fearful that misfortune was about to make her querulous and doubtful of those divine assurances, which, in every trial, had hitherto supported her,

"Yet be it as Thou wilt," she said, with energy; "I know that Thou art with me here—and everywhere!"

The uneasiness of Charles became every moment more oppressive, and at length alarmed her so much, that she could not refrain from speaking to him.

He started up as she called him by his name, and looked about him with a wildness the most alarming.

"Oh, my dear, dear husband," said she, bursting into tears, "what can be the meaning of this?—Speak to me, Charles, where is your pain?"

"Here, here," and he clasped his hands upon his head.

She pressed it to her bosom, and it felt like fire.

"What can I do for him?—oh, what can I do?—will nobody come to me—nobody!" she incessantly repeated, in accents interrupted by sobs; alternately bewailing herself, and trying to soothe his sufferings, which seemed every instant to become more insupportable.

At length she heard a footstep on the stairs. She laid his head gently on the pillow, and flew to the door. A person was passing by it—she cared little for his being a stranger.

"Oh, sir, if you have any compassion in you," she said, "seek instantly for some medical man, and send him here."

The person to whom she thus passionately addressed herself, professed the utmost readiness to be of use, though he remained immoveable, while he uttered innumerable inquiries as to the nature of the case.

Matilda not having the power to reply to them, he used no ceremony in satisfying his curiosity by following her into the apartment, where the sight of Charles extended on his couch, and piteously complaining of his head, afforded him some solution of the question.

Again Matilda repeated her intreaties that he would seek for some medical aid.

After begging her, civilly enough, not to alarm herself, for he hoped her fears were groundless, he departed, promising to dispatch the doctor to her directly.

When more than two hours elapsed, and no one arrived, Charles in the mean time rapidly and visibly getting worse, her agony of mind became so excessive, that she determined upon going herself to seek for assistance; but at this moment a knock at the door announced an arrival.

She opened it, and perceived a tall, shabby, sour-looking man.

"Oh, there is some one ill here, I believe—here, is it?" and he turned to look at the number over the door, to assure himself he was not mistaken.

Matilda satisfied him he had come to the right place, by telling the case in hurried accents, and de-

siring to know his opinion, before indeed he had well had time to form any.

Much inured to sights of misery (for he was the prison doctor, and, as such, had added to the natural indifference which his profession inspired for bodily pain, that contempt of it which sprung from a consciousness of the great probability of not being paid for administering to its relief) he gave very little heed to her anxiety, and returned no answer at all to her question; but having leisurely felt his patient's pulse, made a few brief inquiries, and given some simple directions, he merely added that he would send him a composing draught, and was departing, still impenetrable to the intreaties of Matilda that he would tell her his opinion of the complaint.

"How can I tell, young woman?" he replied sharply. "It may be some weeks before it comes to a crisis, or it may be two or three days. It may turn out a fever on the brain, or it may be nothing more than the effect of mental agitation, which a quieting draught and a good night may alleviate. We can tell nothing till to-morrow morning."

"Then I shall see you again in the morning—oh, pray for pity's sake come!" and a thought occurred to her, that a doubt, reasonable enough, about her finances might make him somewhat tardy with his services, "you may rest assured of every remuneration," she added; "we are not without friends."

This remark was very judiciously applied. His countenance instantaneously relaxed some of its austerity, and he returned back a step or two of the stairs he had descended, to give some fresh directions, adding as he did so, "I hope we shall do very

well ; I see nothing at all alarming—nothing but what you have quite sufficiently accounted for."

Inexpressibly relieved by this assurance, Matilda suffered him to depart, and returned to take her station by the side of her husband.

CHAPTER XV.

The morning came, but brought with it no alleviation. Charles was infinitely worse. A night of restlessness and increasing pain had deprived him almost totally of all rationality. He said but little—but what he did say was rambling and incoherent. Incessantly he called for Matilda, not for two successive minutes conscious of her presence, though she hung over his pillow, and held his hand to her heart.

The return of the apothecary gave her no comfort; for she felt that he was deceiving her, when, in defiance of these alarming symptoms, he persisted in assuring her that he saw no danger.

Her dread of doing wrong in the trying and responsible situation in which she found herself, made her determine before the close of the day to write to Mr. St. Aubyn, telling him the particulars of her present distress, and intreating his counsel ; though even in this heavy trial her delicate mind shrunk from making such a decided claim upon his kindness. But she felt it now to be indispensable to procure for

herself some friend and adviser, and none other appeared to her so eligible. Indeed, she conceived none other to be left her; for her mother, supposing her inclined to come to her (which she would only be with a view of taking her from Charles, and turning him over to a hired nurse,) was, in every point of view, so ill adapted to encounter the horrors of such a situation, that her presence would merely add to difficulty, without eventually proving beneficial. To Mr. St. Aubyn, therefore, she addressed herself. Having simply and naturally related to him the calamities which surrounded her, she concluded in these words:

"I could say much, my dear and excellent friend, upon the pain I feel in making this appeal to kindness, which you have so much cause to think misapplied when extended to my unfortunate husband; but you must believe in the real shame and humiliation which overpowers me. You cannot over-rate it, even if you think that, under all this load of sorrow, when I have none—not one human creature to comfort me—I blush so deeply at applying to you, that I know not how to sign my letter with the name of Matilda."

Her mind was calmed by unfolding her griefs; and the certainty of receiving the readiest sympathy, imparted a degree of comfort to her drooping heart.

The interval of two days passed, and no answer arriving from Mr. St. Aubyn, she felt assured he was coming in person to give a reply to her letter; and before the close of the day she looked for the happiness of seeing him.

Charles, in the mean while, continued in that va-

riable state, which changed from delirium to stupor. Occasionally he knew his wife, and, at such times, expressed his affection for her in the tenderest terms; but his mind was too unsettled, and his sufferings generally too intense, to permit him to hold any thing like conversation.

On this day, after a long insensibility to every outward object, he opened his eyes, and, looking round, he missed her from her constant station by his pillow. He immediately called for her: a summons she quickly obeyed, full of hope in the idea that, in only uttering her name, his voice sounded better, and that he spoke more like himself.

"I am here, my dearest Charles," she said; and having waited in vain for his speaking, she continued, "you wished to say something to me, my love," and she bent near him to catch his words; but the new-born hope died away in her heart, as she marked the still roving, disordered mind, which his abstracted gaze indicated.

"I thought I did," he replied.

But having in vain attempted to collect his thoughts, he shook his head, putting his hand to it to signify the confusion which reigned there.—

"Do not attempt to talk, my dear Charles!" she said, as she pressed her lips to his cheek.

"No, I cannot!" he replied, "I only wanted—to thank you!" Then, after a moment's pause, looking upon her, as if in the wreck of his intellects, a strong consciousness of her worth still survived, "Good Matty—dear Matty!" he said,—"how kind to me!"

Inexpressibly affected, she bowed her head upon his bosom, and there breathed out a fervent ejacula-

tion of thankfulness that, in this heavy trial, she had been enabled to give him consolation, supplicating that she might still be strengthened for all she had to pass through.

It was great indeed, the store of sorrow that yet remained for her. The day passed, and brought with it no tidings of Mr. St. Aubyn. Every hour the situation of Charles became more decided. Since his last address to her he had never spoken; and by the evening he had fallen into the heaviest insensibility; an insensibility so much worse than any he had yet shewn, that even his medical attendant had not another hope to extend, but expressed an apprehension that matters might terminate more seriously than he had expected; and having nothing better to propose for the benefit of his patient, he recommended Matilda to send for a nurse.

Her own strength was so wholly exhausted, that she yielded to his advice, and he promised to send a person to her assistance.

After a long interval, a gaunt, hard featured woman made her appearance, saying she was desired by the doctor to attend her.

Worn down as she was with fatigue, Matilda's heart sunk at the thought of bringing such a creature as this about her poor Charles; a creature whose looks and manner did her the most cruel injustice if she could be any thing less than ferocious.

"I believe, upon the whole, I feel equal to attend upon my husband," said Matilda; "I will not trouble you."

"Well, you may do as you like about that," she

replied; "only Mr. S—— engaged me to sit up, so I must have my half-crown."

Very readily Matilda gave the stipulated offering, most anxious to get rid of her; and the woman having received it, departed with a sneering wish that she might get well through all her troubles.

"May I indeed get through them!" she exclaimed, in a paroxysm of anguish, as soon as she was free to indulge it. "God help us both!—my poor—poor Charles!"—and in the agony of her heart she threw herself by the side of him, who, alike insensible of her sufferings or his own, continued in a state of torpor which was even more shocking than his wildest ramblings.

"Oh, speak to me, Charles," she several times exclaimed; "speak to me, my dear husband!"—But, alas! in vain was the impassioned intreaty!

Though wholly unused to observe or understand the nature of such an illness as that which had so suddenly attacked him, she comprehended enough of it to believe that its termination was already decided; and that the hollow vacancy of his eye, the total abstraction of his senses, too truly betokened that the hand of death was upon him. That look—that terrible look, though never before her eye had rested upon it, was too intelligible. To every fond intreaty that he would speak, it seemed as if a spirit whispered her, "he will speak no more!"

"Oh, no more—no more, indeed!" she exclaimed, bowing her head upon his hand, and giving herself up to the most vehement burst of sorrow; for although he could not be said to have deserved her affection, or engaged her respect, still it was so much

in her nature to attach herself to every living creature who was kind to her, that she undoubtedly loved him. His careless good-humour, his unceasing love for her, his thoughtless generosity, even his very faults, at this sad moment, received, that pitying consideration, that unqualified pardon, which the most obdurate of us know not how to withhold from the fellow creature who never can pain or offend us any more.

How much less then did Matilda retain for her unfortunate husband a thought that did not spring from tenderness and love! She dwelt to agony upon every testimony of his past affection. She sobbed with convulsive sorrow over the recollection of the last the very last words he ever uttered: "Good Matty! Dear Matty!" still seemed to vibrate in her ears. It scarcely appeared to her possible that these fond expressions would never be repeated again! that a few days could have wrought such a work of destruction, and that Charles, yet in the possession of youth, and only one short week since in the full chase of gaiety—full of life and spirits, should be thus suddenly cast down!

"Oh, what is man indeed!" she said, her eyes uplifted to heaven, as awful fear and trembling came upon her. Emotions which could only vent themselves in prayer constrained her to sink down upon her knees.

Words indeed she could utter none; but floods of tears and heavy sighs betokened the fervour with which she raised her heart in supplication for his departing soul.

This mournful night at length waned away, and

the morning's dawn brought with it no consolation. There was apparently not the slightest alteration in the state of Charles.

Satisfied that all was over, Matilda, composed by this sad certainty into that settled sorrow, which is only so much better than suspense that it leaves no possibility for the disappointment of hope, was still stationed by his side, hanging over him with feelings which testified themselves in broken sobs and incessant tears. But there was no terror in her grief; awful as was her trial, she felt inexpressible consolation in not having sunk under it.

"I was called to pass through it *alone*, and I have been enabled to triumph over despair—I have been permitted to be of use—it has been granted me to be of some comfort to you, my poor Charles!" were exclamations which continually mingled with her tears, as now she lifted up her heart devoutly to her Maker, and now cast herself upon the bosom of her senseless husband.

Time advanced, and the hour for the usual visit of the apothecary was at hand.

She almost wished she might not be harrassed by his arrival. She knew that he could afford her no hope; and her mind at the present moment was in a state which she would fain have preserved from the possibility of being disturbed.

It was with a sinking heart, therefore, that she heard, as she supposed, his signal at the door, and approached to answer it.

But a new tide of human feelings again rushed upon her, when, on opening the door, she perceived

standing at it her dear, best friend, Mr. St. Aubyn himself.

"My dear—dear Matilda!" was all the fond exclamation he could articulate as he raised her hand to his lips. "My poor mother knows nothing of this," he said, after a little pause.

A few words of brief explanation satisfied Matilda (had she wanted any such satisfaction,) that not an instant had been lost in hastening to her, as soon as, on calling at her lodgings, Mr. St. Aubyn had learned what had befallen her. They had quitted Brighton before her letter had been sent, and by some mistake it had never reached them. The impossibility of removing Charles, and the melancholy certainty which the first sight of him imparted, precluded his urging any intreaties for their immediate removal.

He, therefore, determined to remain with her; and Matilda, though weeping over the thought of involving him in such a scene of complicated misery, was too much weakened by suffering to oppose his design. It was but for a short period—a period which they both passed in fervent prayer. Another hour made rapid advances in the fate of poor Charles. Severe struggles, convulsive heavings, foretold that all was coming to a close. In vain Mr. St. Aubyn attempted to draw Matilda from his side! she still knelt there, her face bent down upon his hand, which she held firmly grasped in both her own.

A long interval elapsed—and after one deep-drawn, suffocating sigh, she heard him struggle no more.

She raised her head, and fixed her streaming eyes upon his countenance. She then turned upon Edmund a look which wanted no words to tell its meaning.

"It *is* over!—my dear"—he said, as if replying to it, and forcibly raising her in his arms, he took her into an adjoining room.

These words, long as she had been prepared for them, struck like a bolt of ice upon her heart—and she sunk down in speechless anguish.

St. Aubyn hung over her in an agony of sorrow; but while both of them were yet incapable of speaking, other succour unexpectedly appeared in the person of poor Charles's guardian, Mr. Willett, accompanied by his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, one of Matilda's earliest friends; and who, having just returned to town from a long journey, and hearing on their arrival, of the arrest of Charles, and his subsequent removal to the King's Bench, had hastened to the relief of the unfortunate Matilda, little anticipating the sorrow they came to witness. To such friends St. Aubyn could consign the beloved of his heart, which he did with emotions that could not tell themselves in words—"With you I know she will be safe!" was all he could pronounce, as he resigned her to Mr. Willett.

He then, as it were, with a desperate effort, rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

In order to make the reader acquainted with the precise state of St. Aubyn's mind at this time, it will be necessary to revert to the period at which Matilda left Mrs. St. Aubyn a few months since at Brighton.

Catherine was then in a state of strong and peculiar excitement—an excitement which must appear so incomprehensible, to those who are unaccustomed to reflect much upon mysterious subjects, that I fear now, as in an earlier period of her life, she will seem to many to have indulged imagination, till its impulses bordered upon the suggestions of insanity.

But such was not the case: her mind was highly raised—but it was perfectly sane. She believed that she was at this time under an extraordinary and particular dispensation of Providence: but it was a belief united with so much prostration of heart, such genuine repentance, such a fervent desire to act right, as widely distinguished it from the unmeaning ravings of a mere fanatic.

The desire of her son to pursue the labours of his profession in the East, she had pondered upon with maternal unwillingness to yield to his quitting her, and a strong persuasion that it was a sacrifice she was called upon to offer to the will of God—till the

time for peremptory decision had arrived, and St. Aubyn, still lingering after the prosecution of his wishes, for the last time urged her for her resolution.

"In another month the ship was to sail," he told her, "and a particular friend of his, upon whom the chaplaincy was to devolve in case he eventually declined it, had informed him that, however influenced by sentiments of attachment to St. Aubyn, he could not any longer remain in a state of uncertainty respecting his own part in the affair, and must, therefore, press for his immediate determination."

Thus urged, Catherine replied with firmness, "I *will* in a few days, Edmund, give you my final opinion upon this point. There is one friend whose counsel at this time would be very dear to me—I mean Ann Morton. I have for years *talked* of visiting her: if you will accompany me, I will set out directly."

Edmund readily assented to this proposal: and before the evening of the following day, after an absence of nearly thirty years, Catherine was once more pressed to a heart which, in that long—*long* interval had never ceased to beat for her with the strongest of its human attachments.

The variations which time had made in the situation of Ann Morton were simply these. She had grown old—the labours of her school were ended, her sister was dead, and she was living in the same town in a neat little cottage, with just a competence for the moderate comforts of life, "waiting for her summons," as she expressed it, and truly making her soul meet to receive it.

"You find me sadly changed, Ann", said Catherine, remarking the melancholy gaze with which her friend regarded her.

"The casket is worn indeed," replied Ann, "but the gem within—"

"Alas, it is tarnished too," said Catherine, "I am altogether a fallen creature," and she sighed.

"But is there not One who can raise you up?" replied Ann.

"Oh, you would comfort me! I knew that you would comfort me!" said Mrs. St. Aubyn; "I thought that if I came here, I should find comfort! —Oh, those were happy days, Ann,"—her voice faltered and she said no more—till Edmund entering the room, the recollection of the agitating question she came to discuss again prompted her to speak. But it was only the words "my son!" that she had power to pronounce, turning upon Ann, as she uttered them, a look which told all that was labouring so heavily within her bosom.

"Let us say no more to-night," said Edmund, approaching and tenderly taking her hand.

"No, let us say no more, Edmund!" replied she. "By to-morrow night I shall have said all—God helping me!" she added in a faint and broken tone.

During the whole of the following morning Mrs. St. Aubyn was abstracted and silent, and secluded herself as much as possible in her own room. After dinner, she inquired of Ann respecting Mr. Fenton, the first minister who had awakened religious feelings in her mind.

He still fulfilled the office of his ministry, and

would preach, Ann told her, in the evening, it being that on which he usually gave a lecture.

"Then I will hear him," was all that Catherine replied.

At the appointed time they set out, and again Mrs. St. Aubyn found herself in a scene which struck her with the freshness of a yesterday's remembrance.

"Is it possible," she asked herself, "that thirty years can have rolled over my head since first I entered these sacred walls! What have I been doing in that interval? What has occurred in my history?" and she tried to recal, if possible, some prominent point in that momentous period for imagination to rest upon. But all was a chaos of thought—a rambling vision of the night, in pondering upon which remembrance vainly endeavoured to trace connexion and meaning.

She was thus more stupified than impressed by the lesson she was endeavouring to apply to her bosom, till the appearance of Mr. Fenton in his pulpit awoke a train of associations which burst upon her like a stroke of electricity.

His silvered head, his furrowed cheek, his drooping figure, seemed as it were to hold a mirror to her eyes, and to shew her, for the first time, the havoc which thirty years had made upon herself.

She sighed deeply; for however elevated the mind above personal vanity, there is something very mournful in the fading of the body—"and how could we," as Madame de Staël so sweetly expresses it, "how could we support the sorrowful *avant-courier* which nature causes to precede death, if it did not

teach us to abdicate every day, flower after flower, the garland of life."

Her mortal feelings gave place to those which were wholly spiritual, as once more the voice of Mr. Fenton broke upon her ear in the language of prayer. His form indeed was changed; yet his immortal soul was still the same—still animated by the same pursuit—still ennobled by the same emotions—still labouring in the same service—still pressing forward to the same high mark.

"Thirty years ago he prayed for me amongst the rest of his hearers," thought Catherine; "how have those prayers been answered? He has been working while it was day, and his night of rest will be met with a welcome; but I—what have *I* been doing?" was again her mental interrogation.

With these self-searching emotions passing in her bosom, it was almost as if a voice from heaven had addressed her, when he gave out as his text the three last verses of the 8th chapter of Jeremiah:

"The harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.

"For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me.

"Is there no balm in Gilead?—is there no physician there?—why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?"

His countenance, expressive in the highest degree, was marked with the deep amazement, the profound sorrow which the words of the Prophet imply.

He discussed with great perspicuity the particular circumstances in the Jewish people to which they

bore a reference, and then proceeded to apply them in a more especial manner to his hearers.

"To those," he said, "whose harvest is past—whose summer is ended—and who, I fear—I greatly fear, my brethren, I cannot say are saved."

"And this is a very painful thought to me," he continued; "to know that for forty years I have addressed you from this sacred place—for forty years I have been calling upon you in the name of the Lord to repent, and setting before you the fearful judgment that awaits your rejection of the grace he offers you, and yet I find you just as thoughtless, as worldly, as sensual, as far from God as ever; your hearts are hardened, and you *will not* go to him. Perhaps some of you will tell me you cannot: 'I pray, I read the word,' you say, 'I use the appointed means; but I feel a languor in my devotions, a coldness, a formality, which fills me with despair.' To those I would fain speak of comfort. Of those I would ask, 'Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?' Oh, yes, there is—there surely is, beloved brethren," he continued; "He in whose sight a thousand years are but as yesterday, still administers to his faithful people the balm of consolation which alone can restore their wounded souls.

"Fly to him then as to your all. If disease attacks your poor, perishable, mortal frame, which worms will feed upon, and of which nothing will remain in a few short years but a heap of dust, see how you hasten to seek a remedy! how eagerly you hang upon the counsel that is offered you! what privations, what endurance, what self-denial, what suffering will

you not willingly endure, to rescue it a little longer from that grave into which it must eventually drop!

"But your immortal, your invaluable soul!—that part of you which is to live in endless futurity, happy or miserable, according to your own concern for it here—when I think of the little heed you give to this precious treasure, I may indeed say with the prophet, 'I am black—astonishment hath taken hold upon me!'

"You know—you feel its disease: sin is daily and hourly devouring and destroying it, and yet you pause to carry it to the living fountain, in which it can be washed and made clean. You will not go to your heavenly physician, that he may heal you of your fatal sickness. Do you fear that his remedy will be painful? Do you turn from the bitter cup that he may offer you? Has he not himself, for your sake, drank it to the very dregs? Is it self denial, pain, privation, endurance, death, that you may be called upon to suffer—did he not bear it all for you? Then let not fear restrain you from seeking him while yet he may be found. The harvest is past—the summer is ended—the winter is at hand—that fearful winter on which no spring may dawn; that winter of the grave, in which there is no penitence—no prayer—no hope!

"Fly, fly, I entreat you, while life yet animates your bosom! Fly to this blessed physician—to him who has risen with healing in his wings. Sacrifice to Him all that he requires! Pluck out the right eye, or cut off the right hand; break the bonds asunder, and cast away the cords that bind you to the love of

earth, and earth's affections, if thus alone your recovery is to be effected.

"You can never give more than He will repay, in the health to your soul, the comfort to your afflicted spirit, which vainly will you seek elsewhere."

He concluded as usual with a prayer, and his audience dispersed.

Mrs. St. Aubyn's countenance during the greater part of the discourse was concealed in her handkerchief, and Ann Morton could not immediately discover what particular effect it had produced upon her.

She returned home almost in silence, and instantly retired to her chamber.

In about an hour she returned to them. Edmund and his earliest friend were in earnest conversation upon the subject of his mission to the East; Ann Morton, from the nature of her religious notions, strongly seconding his inclinations to accept it, and not hesitating to pronounce it a leading of Providence. They were yet speaking about it when Catherine entered. Her still fine countenance was calm, though the quivering of her lip, and the traces of tears, proclaimed the difficulty with which that calmness had been attained.

She sat down by the side of her son, and taking the hand he offered her—"I told you last night, Edmund," she said, "that, God helping me, I would decide upon your destiny, since your dutiful heart" —she faltered a moment ere she added, "has left decision with me;—I yield to your wishes—I more than yield, I rejoice in them—I give you to God,

who gave you to me, and who now asks you at my hands again. Go—and fulfil his work."

"My dear mother!"—and he pressed her hand to his lips, and to his heart—but she struggled to withdraw it.

"Not now—not now!" she said; "you must not affect me with your tenderness now, Edmund. I shall have to suffer—I shall have to endure; but let this moment of sacrifice be unsullied with mortal regrets—let me preserve the strength which He has given me!"—and she looked upwards with devout supplication that it might be continued to her.

St. Aubyn once again fondly clasping her hand to his lips, hastily withdrew: and, left alone with Ann, Catherine seemed to have regained a degree of safety.

"I was afraid of his tenderness," she said; "I was very much afraid of that, Ann."

"Fear nothing—fear nothing!" replied Ann; who during the whole of this scene, so congenial to her habits of thought, had stood in a rapture of devotion and praise. "He is with you who is your shield and your exceeding great reward!"

"I believe it—I feel it," replied Catherine. She said no more, but retired again to her chamber.

When this state of high excitement had subsided into a calmer frame of mind, Catherine was willing to converse with her son upon the subject. She told him that she should reside for the future with Ann Morton, who was exceedingly desirous to have her company, and whose society was beneficial and pleasing to her beyond that of any other person. She should endeavour to wean her mind from the hope of ever seeing him again, though St. Aubyn held out

to her the prospect of his returning at the end of a few years. "In short, my dear Edmund," she said, "I feel strengthened for this trial beyond my utmost hopes. There is but one thing I dread; and I would fain, if possible, avoid it:—it is the moment—the actual moment—of parting! Steal from me, my dear son, when I know nothing of your intentions. Do not say farewel to me, Edmund; it is a word I tremble at the thought of pronouncing," and indeed at the bare idea her cheek was bathed in tears.

It was to spare this fond and dear mother that sorrowful hour, that St. Aubyn, at the appointed moment, had silently and secretly taken his departure from her; leaving her with his heart broken by conflicting emotions, and only soothed into a state of tolerable calmness by praying for her welfare, and consigning her with many tender injunctions to the care of the kind hearted Ann.

He had protracted his leaving her till the very last moment, and the ship in which he was to depart was on the very eve of sailing, when he arrived in London. Yet to quit England without one inquiry after Matilda, he felt would be inflicting upon himself a ceaseless source of anguish! He repaired to her lodgings for one brief interview—one sad adieu! what was his horror and surprise at being directed to the wretched place where she and her unfortunate husband had fixed their dwelling!

"Matilda in prison!—Matilda in want!" had been the only idea which filled his mind as he rapidly hastened to the King's Bench. It was not till he had fulfilled every office of kindness and affection, in supporting her by the death-bed of her husband, in

soothing her grief, in seeing her safe in the care of a tender friend, that a thought of himself came to his recollection. But when it did come!—when it suggested that not another hour remained for him to linger there, that he had sealed his fate, and that, in the very dawn of hope, it must die and be forgotten—it brought with it a pang of despair, such as St. Aubyn had never yet experienced.

"This is indeed affliction!" he exclaimed, as he sought a moment of solitude when he returned to his inn, in which to consider if the human feelings that so sorely beset him might not be virtuously indulged.

But the inconsistency of drawing back from his office at this moment—an office which he had accepted with so much hesitation and delay—with such earnest prayer, and with so strong and encouraging a belief that an answer was given to his prayers—an answer which directed him to the measure he had just been about to pursue!

"No, no—I must not—I will not—I dare not!" he exclaimed aloud, as he struggled with the anguish which shook his frame with convulsive suffering. "But strengthen me, Thou that art strong to help!" he continued, "oh, strengthen me!" and soothed by the very fervour of his supplication, he wiped from his brow the big drops that stood upon it, and from his cheek the tears; and resisting with his utmost force the deep drawn sighs in which his agony of mind was passing away, he sat down and wrote these few lines to Matilda:

"I am called away, my dear Matilda. I have accepted a chaplaincy in the East Indies, and must instantly depart! It is not permitted me to see you

again—but to pray for you will be given me as long as life continues! Mr. Willett will tell you all that you may wish to know respecting me and my dear mother. Farewel—God for ever bless you!

E. St. Aubyn."

He hastened back with the rapidity of one who flies from the danger of his own suggestions to the King's Bench.

The Willetts had departed, taking with them Matilda. He repaired to their house, and seeing Mr. Willett, he informed him of his present circumstances, and left with him his note to Matilda.

To his inquiries after her, he received an answer that she was in a very agitated state, but endeavouring to seek repose. St. Aubyn begged that she might not be disturbed by his communication at present, unless she particularly asked for him.

He calmly declined all Mr. Willett's inquiries as to whether he would not see her—whether he could not, without inconvenience, delay for a few hours his departure.

"No," he said, "it cannot be—all is ready—all is determined—farewel!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE succession of griefs which so rapidly pursued Matilda, had left her with little power to step out of the circle of her own sorrows to take part in the distresses of another. But, suffering as she was in spirit, and labouring under indisposition of body so severe as confined her almost to her bed, her first impulse on reading Mr. St. Aubyn's note, and hearing from Mr. Willett the present situation of his mother, had prompted her to write to that anxious mother with the utmost solicitude, informing her of her own peculiar affliction at this time, and intreating, as soon as her health was sufficiently restored to admit of her making such an effort, that Mrs. St. Aubyn would receive a visit from her, "that together," as she expressed it, "they might mingle their griefs, and seek the only aid which could administer to their comfort."

In a few days she received the following reply—

"I sympathise with you, my dearest Matilda—you will readily believe, at a moment like this, how deeply my heart sympathises in your distress; and I could address to you, my love, many words of consolation; but they *must* sound tame and commonplace. Suffer me, therefore, instead of this, to beguile your attention for a while from the contemplation of your own sorrows, by speaking of myself—a

poor theme, Matilda!—a very worthless theme; but perhaps, just now, fraught with a little of that instruction which the meanest of us, in our errors, in our mistakes, and in our sufferings, may impart to the wisest.

"You think me unhappy, and in the kindness of your heart you would come to comfort me. It is very true that I am suffering, 'troubled on every side, but not cast down.' Edmund, my dear and only son, is gone from me; and I believe that I shall look upon him no more in the land of the living. But one is left to me, who, under God, is building up my soul for heaven; and with her, Matilda, I find a consolation no words can render intelligible. It is Ann Morton, of whom you have heard me speak in terms of affection; but oh, how inadequate to her worth, or to the debt of gratitude I owe her. Her natural disposition, like mine, is enthusiastic, and, of course, her religious opinions are tinctured with it in no small degree. But, Matilda, is it permitted us to be energetic in every other question? Shall feeling and passion upon many points, be not only recognised as natural; but even as laudable, and where our eternal interest is at stake, where the affections are exercised upon objects which are to employ and occupy them through countless ages of bliss or misery, is it there that it becomes us to be lukewarm, temperate, calculating, and calm? 'I cannot be this half-animated Christian,' said Ann to me this morning, as we were discussing the manner in which the generality of those who call themselves Christians, receive and practise the precepts which are to guide them to eternal life.

"'If Revelation be true, if it be indeed the light which God has given me to walk by in the dark and devious path of life; if the words it speaks are words from heaven—words that tell me of a Saviour who lived and died to redeem my soul from death, and to shew me a path to everlasting happiness; if this be so, can I be otherwise than warm and zealous in striving to fulfil what it enjoins? Am I to be indifferent whether I fulfil it or not? Can I do less, in short, than devote my life to that which is to save my life?

"'If this be not the case,'" she continued; 'if a less rigid sacrifice is demanded of me; if I may take my lot in this life; if I may say to my soul, 'thou hast many goods laid up for thee;' if, in short, I may make the path to heaven a plain and easy one, let me burn my Bible at once, since on that supposition its monitions never can be true. The gate to life never can be strait and narrow, if those are to find it who seek it after the manner of the world at large. But you and I, Catherine, we know better things—we have not so learned the Gospel.'

"I sighed heavily, Matilda—not that I doubted her words: I too well know that the path of worldly pleasure, in which for so many years my feet have wandered, has been a path of wretchedness and error. But I sighed to think through what resistance on my part, of pride and passion, of a hard and corrupt heart, and of a senseless imagination, my merciful Father has led me to Himself, as if He would not let me find my rest in any thing short of those glorious hopes which He has given to them that love

"Oh, what a vain, self-depending, ignorant creature have I been for years!—thinking that I could find the way to heaven without difficulty and without endurance! Presuming that a just and holy Being could look upon a heart full of worldly cares and pursuits, unsanctified by divine grace—never brought near to its Maker by a contemplation of Him in His dealings with His creatures—never aspiring after communion with Him in prayer, but giving all its affections to a hollow and deceitful world—spending itself for that which was not bread, and labouring for that which satisfied it not.

"Ah, He has indeed scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts!

"He has cast me down, Matilda; but it was to raise me up again, and I am strong in His support.

"I will not ask you, then, my dearest, to come to me. There are yet human feelings to be subdued, which the sight of you would revive with a strength it might be difficult for me to combat. Let me hear from you; and when I wish to see you, and feel that I can do so without danger, I will communicate such a desire to you. In the mean time, believe me thinking of you with prayers, and with an affection which you share equally with my beloved Edmund. But do not in your letters, at present, speak to me of my son. All is as it should be in my heart respecting him—but still do not speak of him.

"I must say farewel, my best beloved Matilda—as dear and interesting as if you had been my own child, will your fate ever be to

CATHERINE ST. AUBYN."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Not to pause upon this period of our story, we will pass over the first few months of Matilda's widowhood; an interval which she spent entirely in the society of her good friends the Willets. Mrs. St. Aubyn, though corresponding with her, still declining, with an earnestness which could not be resisted, her young friends repeated wishes to visit her.

Considering it as a circumstance which affected her own welfare, the death of Charles could not reasonably be regarded, either by Matilda or her friends, as a misfortune.

But Matilda was a being of no selfish feelings—no contracted views; and the deep melancholy into which she sunk upon the loss of her husband, sprung from regrets, which no common or ordinary mind could sympathise with or understand; because ordinary minds, having given to their departed friends and relatives the usual quantity of lamentation, instinctively follow the advice of survivors; and, having joined in mutual hopes, and assurances that the deceased is "happy" (as the phrase is), they put themselves into becoming mourning, and gradually become happy also.

This is the usual way of disposing of subjects which are sure to be brought under the consideration

of us all. The consideration!—I recal the word. We do not—we dare not consider them!

A few perhaps there are who, like Matilda, of pious and contemplative minds, often turn upon the state of the departed spirit a thought of trembling, anxious inquiry; a thought which, day by day, and hour by hour, while the first burst of grief is recent, and long after its intensity is subdued, suggests, not the careless undoubting conviction, "he whom we have lost is happy," but the Christian's supplicating desire, the believer's trust, "as far as it may be permitted me to hope for the dead, I hope for him!"

Such, for many weeks and months, was the devout aspiration of Matilda; and still, as time stole on, though mellowed down, as of necessity all sorrow must be, by the operation of that silent power which conquers every thing, still was every frequent remembrance of Charles—his thoughtless life, his early death—still was it accompanied by these fervent breathings of her soul.

Not, be it imagined, that we would represent Matilda, as in a romantic spirit, nursing up painful recollections which a common and worldly observer would conceive to yield readily and instantly to the comfortable certainty that she was delivered from a connexion which had embittered her life, and brought her into a state of the most abject wretchedness.

No—she was not doing this; on the contrary, she was striving to the utmost to struggle with that disposition to melancholy which she believed was in a degree natural to her, and which the circumstances of her life were so much of a kind to foster.

In the course of nature a much extended life was

yet before her. To have followed the dictates of her inclination, indeed, how willingly would she have gathered up the fortune that remained to her, and in some retreat, where worldly joys and giddy pleasures, and the thoughtless mortals who pursue them, might never more molest her; how willingly would she have occupied it in her own quiet, unobtrusive, innocent way; but she felt that there was yet good for her to do, and in performing it she anticipated all the happiness which yet remained to her.

It was to dedicate herself to the education of her little sisters, now growing up to an age when it became exceedingly desirable to employ some counteracting influence to the example and instruction of both their parents.

The first visit Matilda was favoured with from her mother after the death of Charles, had been paid to her in due form at Mr. Willett's. Mr. Belgrave did not make his appearance upon the occasion, but Mrs. Belgrave assured her daughter that she was commissioned from him to present her, not only with the usual complimentary condolences upon her loss, but also to inform her that he renewed the invitation she had formerly declined, and should be happy to see her at Wimbledon, as soon as she pleased.

At this time, however, Matilda was wholly unequal to avail herself of his politeness; and had she been sufficiently armed in health and spirits to encounter the reflections upon poor Charles which she was tolerably certain of hearing, Mr. Willett in his decided way settled the question for her by saying he did not at present choose to part with her.

Mrs. Belgrave, therefore, disguising her ire as

well as she could, and having administered to Matilda's unceasing tears exactly the same consolation varied only in words, which she had offered her upon the loss of her baby, she departed, and very little intercourse occurred between them for the ensuing six months.

At the end of that time the Belgraves came to town for the winter; and upon some account or other Mrs. Belgrave was tempted to make a visit to her daughter, accompanied by her children, to the number of four. As she was by no means in the habit of associating with them, more particularly of turning out with a carriage full of them in the streets of London, Jane Willett attributed the circumstance to her having a natural anxiety to shew Matilda what pretty healthy little creatures they were. Elizabeth believed, that as they were all very fashionably, and for their age absurdly, attired, they were brought there to be admired for their dress rather than their health. Matilda, on her part, without knowing or caring for the motive which procured her a sight of them, was so moved with compassion as she looked upon them, in all their finery and folly, that she silently but resolutely determined to think upon some method of gaining an influence over these poor infants, to rescue them from the inevitable ruin she saw impending over them.

Mrs. Belgrave having done her best to draw them out and induce them to shew off all their accomplishments, at length rose to depart, asking Matilda, as she did so, if she had formed any plan for her future life; again repeating, though distantly, an offer of her house for her home, till she had found one more

agreeable to her: an offer which Matilda did not now as hitherto, so decidedly decline; for, as we have just hinted, her heart was really affected by the miserable manner in which she saw her mother was bringing up her family; and in the hope of doing them good in their present deplorable state, she replied to her invitation by holding out a prospect of availing herself of it.

In a few weeks more, some intercourse having taken place between her and the children, she found them so docile and tractable, particularly the two eldest, who had in a manner grown up to love her, and were now old enough to be wrought upon by her counsels, that for their sakes she determined upon establishing herself, not indeed under the roof of Mr. Belgrave, for that was a species of infliction it did not appear necessary to undergo, but at Wimbledon, in some retired dwelling, where she would be still at hand to exercise her kind intentions.

She was on the point of proceeding to realise her purpose, when an event occurred which occasioned her to take up her entire residence with her mother.

It was an event which occasioned great surprise to all parties, not being expected by any, and least of all by the one principally concerned; to be brief, it was nothing less than the death of Mr. Belgrave himself; who, from the solid and (in his own mind) the most fast and firm possession of his fine house, and fine grounds, and fine fortune, and all other fine things, was suddenly called away by an illness as short (and, when it came to be his own case, not considered quite so fortunate a one,) as that which had carried off Charles Harcourt.

Had it not been that he took away a considerable portion of her consequence with him, Mrs. Belgrave would not perhaps again have been the most inconsolable of women: but she was doomed to be unlucky in the loss of both her husbands. The first who departed, though he was civil enough to bequeathe only one child to share with her what he possessed, had unfortunately of worldly matters but a very slender store; and the second, though substantial and rich, having provided five claimants, and one of them a son, to divide his property, she had very little chance of being eventually much better off than if she had remained a widow after her first espousals.

Helpless under every circumstance of life that called for exertion of mind, she turned, upon this unexpected calamity, to Matilda as to her only refuge; not with a chastened or subdued spirit, but with a querulous murmur of complaint, which a less generous or noble disposition than her daughter's might have requited, by retorting upon her some of the common-place consolation which in her own similar and recent distress Matilda had received from her. But to do all the good in her power was the prevailing and supporting principle of this excellent young creature's life.

To the home, therefore, which had been the shelter—but oh, how far from the comfort—of her early years! to the protection which had sanctioned, but never soothed her with a parent's presence, she again returned; and thus, after the busy interval of a few sorrowful and eventful years, Matilda, by duty, and her mother, by the experience of her daughter's value, were again brought together.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE principal variation in Matilda's life for the next two years, arose from the circumstance of her mother's removing, upon the loss of her husband, with her whole establishment into foreign parts. Her first point of destination had of course been Paris, that city being considered by her as a becoming sphere in which to exhibit charms, which though now somewhat in the wane, were still of a kind to occasion their possessor a great portion of vanity and vexation of spirit. In fact, there is scarcely any period in the life of a woman who has been handsome, and whose chief claims to distinction have been built upon the foundation of her beauty, in which her rage for admiration is more insatiate than when admirers first begin to disappear, consequently there is no era in her life so fraught with disappointment and dismay.

It was a happy circumstance in Mrs. Belgrave's case—and she was a woman, as we have before had occasion to remark, who covered her actions with the best motives she could find for them—it was a happy circumstance for her that Mr. Belgrave's departure occurred at a time when she had so much cause to grieve for the death of her beauty, inasmuch as it furnished her with an ostensible and very ami-

able cause for the dejection of spirits, and restlessness of mind, which every day increased upon her.

"England was no longer England to her," she told Matilda, "since dear Mr. Belgrave was gone!" and so, after many heavy sighs and lamentations, she decided upon betaking herself into another land; the malevolent did say, not without hopes of finding another Mr. Belgrave there.

No such person, however, appeared. She passed through the south of France, Switzerland, Rome, Naples, Florence, retraced her route, and at the end of two years of discontent and rambling, landed at Dover—the same vain, unhappy, selfish woman she had been thirty years before.

It may well be supposed that with the fretfulness of advancing life, added to her original faults, Mrs. Belgrave conducted herself to her daughter with no improved demeanor. She was, as she had ever been to her—a trial; but Matilda was now sustained to support it. The improvement in the children was a strong tie to keep her with them.

The wandering, unsettled life which Mrs. Belgrave led on the Continent, had almost precluded the possibility of Matilda's retaining any friendship that was to be kept up by correspondence. Mrs. St. Aubyn's letters seldom reached her till they were many weeks old, in consequence of being forwarded after her from place to place.

The last she had received from her, was dated three months previous to the present period. It contained intelligence of a painful character; so painful indeed, that only the hope it imparted of St. Aubyn's return to England ameliorated the grief it occasioned

her. Catherine, though still animated with the same religious feelings, and speaking of herself as generally happy, acknowledged that her health was much impaired, and that her spirits at times were greatly depressed by uncertainty as to the fate of her son; who, in his last letter, had represented the climate of India as so inimical to his constitution, as to render him fearful whether he should be able to continue there; and prepared her for the possibility of seeing him at no very distant period.

"In this state of anxious suspense, I cannot always find the peace I seek," she said; "and if you should return to England, while it is permitted me to see you, I will not now request you to delay a visit to me, my Matilda."

The town of C——, at which Mrs. St. Aubyn continued to reside with her friend Ann, was but a short distance out of their direct road: and Matilda, on landing in England, had obtained her mother's acquiescence in her wish of making Mrs. St. Aubyn the visit she was now willing to receive.

She took leave of Mrs. Belgrave, therefore, within a few miles of C——; and while her mother proceeded with her family to London, Matilda with an anxious heart was hastening to meet her long absent friend.

It was a beautiful autumnal evening, and as she travelled along through a rich and charming country, her thoughts, though tinged with melancholy, derived something soothing from the objects around her. The charm of retirement, the simplicity of rural manners, the nature, the truth that surrounded the scene, presented pleasing images for fancy to

work upon. To a contemplative mind, there is a pleasure in the most simple objects. The busy team passing to and fro, the song of the harvest-man, the sound of the sportsman's gun as he returns home, the blue smoke curling up from the cottage in the vale, all these vestiges of the declining year assimilated well with what was passing in the mind of Matilda. The remembrance of bright hopes and busy expectations; the dreams of youth, once to her imagination as bright and glowing as the sensible objects her eye now rested upon—"but fading as these must fade," she thought, "into a scene of wintry desolation."

Her reveries were checked by her approach to the town; and on inquiry they were directed to a lowly dwelling in the suburbs, as the residence of Mrs. Morton.

Arrived there, Matilda's palpitating heart began to throb with renewed anxiety, as she anticipated the fond welcome, the more than maternal love with which her arrival would be greeted: and she cast a longing glance at the window, in expectation of seeing at it the well-known form she longed to clasp to her heart.

But no one appeared; she descended from her chaise, and having knocked at the door, it was answered by a female servant, of whom she made a hurried inquiry respecting Mrs. St. Aubyn.

"She is still alive, ma'am," she replied, with the calmness of one who supposed her acquainted with the present situation of her she inquired after.

"Alive!" Matilda repeated, turning pale with surprise and alarm.

"Did you not know, ma'am, how very ill she has been the last two months?"

"No, I knew nothing!" and she trembled with agitation; which the servant perceiving, requested her to walk in, and she would call her mistress.

Matilda announcing the name she was to take to Mrs. Morton, followed her into the parlour; and throwing herself into a chair, she gave unrestrained indulgence to the tears which this heavy disappointment wrung from her.

"Yet am I thankful," she said, "that she yet lives; that it is permitted me to see her once again!" Her head was bent down upon her hand, and she still was weeping, when the door opened, and an aged lady of the most benignant and prepossessing aspect made her appearance, and whom Matilda had no difficulty in concluding to be Mrs. Morton. She approached with extended hand, and a smile upon her countenance.

"Your arrival, Mrs. Harcourt," she said, "brings to us great comfort. The sight of you, and one other person, is all the lingering after human consolation which still clings to our beloved friend. You are here, and we look for the *possibility* of Edmund's coming every hour. His last letter spoke of his intention to sail with the very next opportunity; and ships, we are told, are daily expected. But we do not dwell upon this."

"I had anticipated a far happier meeting with my dear"—Matilda was impeded by her tears from proceeding.

"You could not have a happier than you will find," said Ann; "all is ready. Her soul is at peace, and

she is willing at any moment to depart. But she will see you, and then your disappointment will give way to triumphant joy."

She returned to the apartment of Mrs. St. Aubyn, and in a few minutes she brought word to Matilda that she was anxious to see her, and they proceeded to her room. Prepared as Matilda had been for witnessing a painful alteration in the person of this being so dear to her, she had not calculated upon the total change which had been wrought in her appearance since last they met.

Wasted to a shadow, and with a countenance already touched by the livid hue of death, it was only by her smile, the most beautiful, the most expressive that ever animated human features, that Matilda could have recognised that it was Mrs. St. Aubyn into whose arms she hastened, and upon whose bosom she gave way to a burst of sorrow which could not be controlled.

"This must be!—yes, I knew that this must be," said Catherine, repelling the efforts by which Ann Morton endeavoured gently to withdraw Matilda from her bosom. "Let her have indulgence—she will not weep for me long. No, my own Matilda," she continued, fondly kissing her cheek, "you will rather rejoice with me, for I am very happy—I am indeed very happy!"

"God grant it—God grant it!" Matilda exclaimed with energy;—"but pardon me a little moment;" and she withdrew to the window, and struggled with her agony of feeling. In a few minutes she returned to the side of Catherine, down whose faded cheek a few tears were trickling, but they mingled with the

sweet smile which still kept possession of her features.

"What did you say to me last night, Ann?"—she said, turning to her, as she occupied a seat on the other side. "I was full of despondency last night, my love," she proceeded, addressing Matilda; "I thought of my dear Edmund, and my dear Matilda—and shall I never see them more? I said. Oh, if these two children of my love could but be given to me—but for one hour—*one* hour only! and thus I was tossed upon the waves of human anxiety; and it seemed to me that I must perish, so great was my despair; but she comforted me with the assurance that the Master was with me, though he seemed to sleep; and that he would rebuke the wind and storm, and I should yet find a calm. Good Ann, how truly have you prophesied! I am calm—I am full of hope!"

She paused a little while, and then with a degree of anxiety she proceeded: "Yet is there one mortal desire, one earthly wish, that still cleaves to me; and when I have strength to speak of it I will impart it—at present I am exhausted!" and she reclined her head upon the side of her chair, retaining Matilda's hand, as if desiring her stay, but incapable of continuing to converse with her.

Matilda sat by her side, watching with intense anxiety every variation of her face, which, sunk and hollow as it was, scarcely appeared to her as indicating that her mortal change was yet at hand.

CHAPTER XX.

The whole of the following morning Mrs. St. Aubyn was too ill to rise from her bed, or to converse. In the evening she got up and appeared better; and though she was still silent, it seemed to be more from unwillingness than inability to discourse. She was apparently absorbed in some deep and agitating feeling which occasionally prompted a short ejaculation, a brief prayer for pardon, as though the idea which occupied her was one that ought not to mingle with the holy desires, and sublime aspirations, with which she wished to sanctify her soul, and make it meet for the presence of its maker.

"Only this mortal hope—only this!"—she more than once repeated, in a faint, subdued tone.

At length, apparently availing herself of the absence of Ann, who had been suddenly called out of the room, she addressed Matilda.

"I have been a visionary, dear Matilda, all my life; and even in departing for ever from this scene of shadows, some of them attract my fancy with a fond and lingering gaze.

"One now arrests my attention in the form of a being whom Edmund, my dear son, most tenderly loved."

Matilda started at this intelligence, for a surmise of his having formed any attachment had never occurred to her.

"Indeed!"—she repeated, scarcely knowing that she spoke. "He loved her, Matilda, with a love such as a nature, constant as St. Aubyn's never knows but once. She knew nothing of his passion; and her affections being given to another—she married; and Edmund's happiness, as far as related to this world, was gone for ever. To banish her image from his thoughts, he willingly yielded to what he believed to be the command of heaven, and left his native land. With broken health, and a still fondly attached heart, he returns to his country. Oh, that I could but say that he returns to her, who is now free to receive his vows! Oh, that it might but be given me to join his hand in her's—and then, like aged Simeon to depart in peace!"

"Matilda, look up at me, my child—lift up your sweet face, and say, 'your wishes shall be gratified!'"

"Oh, spare me a little interval, only a little interval, for thought and prayer!" said Matilda, raising from her clasped hands the agitated face which, while Mrs. St. Aubyn proceeded in her brief narration, had sunk still lower and lower, suffused with deeper and deeper hues, as sudden gleams of a truth so unexpected, and so big with meaning, broke upon her.

That St. Aubyn had loved her so long, so fervently, so silently—that for her sake he had quitted his country and his friends—that he still loved her

—and that it remained with her to gild the last hours of his fond mother with hope and comfort, by yielding to her wishes—were thoughts which scarcely left her the power of opposing the desire of Mrs. St. Aubyn, if to oppose it had been a strongly predominant inclination in her own breast. But Matilda had not been an unhappy wife without applying to herself a moral never to be forgotten. She had not united her fate with one too hastily loved, too superficially approved, without well understanding that a woman better secures her felicity by a union founded upon sentiments of esteem, and a perfect knowledge of the principles and character of the person she marries, than by entertaining the most refined and romantic passion.

It was, therefore, more the suddenness of the intelligence Mrs. St. Aubyn imparted, than the nature of it, which caused her to retreat from at present pursuing this unexpected theme. "To-morrow we shall be better able,"—she began to say, but at that moment a low and stifled sound of voices in the passage near her room, awoke the attention of Mrs. St. Aubyn.

"I hear a voice—it is—it is my son!" she said, clasping her hands together in a paroxysm of joy, which Matilda, under a conviction of her deluding herself with a vain expectation, endeavouring to moderate.

"I fear you mistake, my dear Mrs. St. Aubyn—you certainly mistake."

"I cannot, I do not mistake, Matilda," she repeated, as again a tone, which Matilda herself believ-

ed to be that of St. Aubyn's voice, broke upon her ear, though the words it uttered were wholly inarticulate.

"It is the voice of Edmund!" she said; "more dear to me than the first hour in which it greeted me with a mother's name. Bring him hither, Matilda, before I die under the joy of this moment—Oh, bring him to me"—and overpowered with emotion she burst into a flood of tears.

Matilda, still trembling with the fear of her disappointment, hastened to seek confirmation for their mutual hopes; but on reaching the door she was met by Ann Morton, behind whom stood indeed St. Aubyn himself, waiting for her signal before he advanced further.

At the sight of Matilda he involuntarily extended his hands and approached nearer, and Catherine, as she sat, caught a glimpse of his figure. "My dear son!—come near me, my son—come near me!"—she uttered with all the strength her feeble powers afforded.

He needed not to have the request repeated, but darting forward, in a moment he had pressed her to his heart—he had kissed her altered cheek, her wasted hands; and now he was kneeling at her feet, and hiding on her knees the tears and sobs which alone found utterance in this hour of agony.

Catherine was the first to speak, and it was in the sound of thankful rapture that her words found way. "I waited patiently for the Lord," she said with her eyes uplifted and a holy smile. "I waited for him, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry!"

"Oh praise him for me, my beloved friends," she said, "for I am very weak and powerless!" and, almost fainting, she reclined her head and was silent, only looking upon Edmund as he still retained his station at her feet, with an affection which it was beautiful to behold.

Ann Morton and Matilda in vain intreated her to endeavour to recruit her wasting spirits with an interval of quiet. But she shook her head, as intimating extreme repugnance to be removed to her bed.

"This is very sweet to me—very sweet!" she said; "if my dear Edmund would but believe in my happiness. Look at me, my son—I am full of joy!" and with her feeble hand she tried to raise his head, which was still bent down upon her lap to hide the convulsive sorrow with which his manly breast was full.

He kissed her hand—and rising, he intreated she would suffer him to leave her for a few moments.

In a short time he returned more tranquil, and was able to meet her ready welcome with a corresponding smile. She desired to hear of his health—of his voyage—all that related to him.

It was briefly told; his health was feeble, but in some measure restored; he had just landed, and had instantly hastened to her.

"But now," said Ann, "for a short interval permit me to take this weary traveller away, who equally with you must need repose, or at all events refreshment." And though not likely to avail himself of her last suggestion, St. Aubyn, for the sake of al-

lowing a period for his mother to compose herself, now withdrew. Matilda also, at the suggestion of Ann, retired for a short time to her apartment.

The mind, like the body, is capable of sustaining only a certain degree of excitement; beyond that it becomes torpid, and in a great measure insensible. The variety of agitating ideas which circumstances had so rapidly crowded upon Matilda's thoughts during the last few hours, had bereaved her of the power of considering them with any other sensation than that of astonishment bordering upon stupefaction. The direction she would give to her own fate, by yielding assent to the wishes of Mrs. St. Aubyn if she again repeated them, occasionally startled her with a feeling of dread and apprehension, but it was a feeling faint and indistinct, and blended with others so much more oppressive in her solicitude and grief for Catherine's situation, as comparatively to occupy but a small portion of her thoughts.

She had been alone in her apartment for more than an hour, endeavouring to tranquillise her spirits, when she heard a knock at the door.

Ann Morton presented herself, with a face disturbed by emotions which she was struggling to the utmost to restrain.

"She is worse!" Matilda exclaimed; "your looks tell me so," and she hastened forward.

But Ann for a moment arrested her intention: "Do not hurry, do not alarm yourself," she said; "there is a change—and I believe the time is come."

Matilda clasped her hands upon her bosom, and uttered a faint groan of sorrow.

"But all is well—all is happy!" she continued, "and why should we weep, poor ignorant creatures that we are?" and she tried to resist the tears which would force their way down her furrowed cheek. "But come with me, my dear, and look upon her triumph; come, and see how God supports his people!" and she took the hand of the trembling Matilda, and led her to the chamber of death.

The first glance at the countenance of Catherine told Matilda what was approaching. She had been removed to her bed, and there she was now reclining, with one hand clasped in that of her son, who, kneeling by her side, was trying to read to her the portion of scripture she had wished to hear. It was the twenty-third psalm.

His voice was broken, and his cheek was pale; but sublime and animating hope sustained him, and St. Aubyn was firm to meet this trying hour. The face of Catherine was all radiant with heavenly aspirations.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters."

"Is not that beautiful, dear Edmund!" she said; when having ceased to read, he for an interval covered his face, and gave indulgence to his human feelings.

"And Matilda too—do you weep for me?" she continued, in a tone of gentle reproach, as she beheld her stealing to the side of St. Aubyn, and quite incapable of uttering the words of consolation that trembled on her tongue, then cast herself down upon the bed dissolved in tears.

St. Aubyn without raising his head was sensible of

her approach. Grateful for her pity, and grieved for her distress, he took her hand and pressed it jointly with that of his departing mother, to his heart and to his lips.

"One human wish, and only one, yet lingers, Ann," said Catherine, as if doubtful till she had the sanction of this supporting friend, how far its indulgence might be permitted.

"Then give it utterance, dear Catherine," she replied. "Till the departing soul has wholly put off the incumbrance of flesh, some mortal hope will stay. He that died for us, in his parting moments remembered to commend his mother to his beloved disciple. Speak then, my dearest, and may your desire be fulfilled!"

"Matilda—St. Aubyn—then come to me still nearer!" she said.

They both rose to meet her extended arms, and taking a hand of each, she joined them together.

St. Aubyn for an instant clasped to his bosom the unresisting Matilda, and both turned to take the embrace of tenderness and joy with which Catherine sealed upon the bosom of each, the accomplishment of her last earthly wish.

It seemed as if a desire to view the completion of this anxious hope had enabled her to resist the grasp of death till it was crowned with fruition, for no sooner had she witnessed its conclusion, than she sunk into the arms of her son, subdued and almost speechless.

Her sweet features uplifted to heaven, were yet illumined with a sort of rapture, and half uttered

sounds of prayer and praise still murmured from her lips. They died away in labouring sighs, but the struggle though severe was short. Her spirit was soon liberated from its earthly prison, and transplanted into brighter realms.

CHAPTER XXI.

We pass over the interval of a few months. It was on a sweet afternoon in early spring that Matilda was called from the tea-table of Mrs. Belgrave, at which she as usual had just sat down to officiate, by the servant bringing her a message that a gentleman wished to speak with her in the garden.

"A gentleman!" exclaimed Mrs. Belgrave, "who is he—what is his name?"

But while the footman was endeavouring to appease the irritated inquiries of his mistress by explaining what he did not know—Matilda taking up her hat and shawl hastened into the garden, there to meet one, scarcely less dear to her upon more intimate acquaintance with his virtues, than she was to him at the time his expiring mother joined their hands together. He came now for the first time to be introduced to Mrs. Belgrave as Matilda's future husband, and to name the happy day that was to unite him with one so justly dear to his affections. Over all that he had to say, and she to reply, our

readers will pardon us for being brief; because if we were to specify all this in detail, it would occupy as much time as he and Matilda passed over it; and that being nearly an hour, we should perhaps draw upon ourselves as much anger as Matilda did when, just as the tea-equipage was being removed from the table, she again made her appearance before the incensed Mrs. Belgrave.

"Upon my word, Mrs. Harcourt, this is very curious conduct!" she observed, as Matilda entered the room.

Matilda merely observing that she had accidentally been detained, and desiring that the tea-tray might not be kept any longer on her account, as she should drink no tea—retired to her own room to think upon the manner in which she was to unfold her present circumstances.

As soon as her mind was a little composed she remembered that a speedy explanation was due to her mother, whose astonishment was already excited, and which would increase to a degree that might cause her some trouble, if Mr. St. Aubyn made his promised visit in the course of the evening before she had received any preparation to expect him.

She descended therefore to the sitting room, and with less agitation, though not with less affection than on a former occasion, she disclosed her case.

Mrs. Belgrave was struck with wonder, and doubt, and confusion. If Mr. St. Aubyn had ever distinguished her with the slightest degree of more attention than he had done, she would have thought that

Matilda must be mistaken, and that he had intended his addresses for her, and had taken an opportunity of sending them to her through her daughter.

"Such an old man!" she repeatedly exclaimed.

"Why I dare say he is seven and thirty!"

Matilda did not know any thing about that—his age she had never thought about.

"Well, if you like him," Mrs. Belgrave continued, upon a monitory suggestion of her conscience that it would be as well for her to say as little as possible about the imprudence of second marriages.

Matilda did not think it necessary to explain how far she liked him—and Mrs. Belgrave went on as she had expected—"And now, then, I shall have to look out for a governess again for Emily and Fanny!"

But this was a point so really and truly dear to Matilda's disinterested heart, that she could not talk of her own prospects till she had arranged for the welfare of these children, to whom she had the sweet satisfaction of believing she had been of much service. "If her mother had no objection, they might both, she was sure, reside with her—at least for the present,"—a proposal to which Mrs. Belgrave with great happiness agreed—and this point settled, she believed, she said, upon the whole, it might turn out a very comfortable match—and perhaps she herself should settle in their neighbourhood. How far this measure might increase their comforts, Matilda did not at the present moment pause to consider—the variations of her mother's mind held out great hope that many an abode might have the honour to receive

her before she consented to grow old and rest quietly any where.

Another year behold Matilda the wife of St. Aubyn. He had been presented with a living, and their income more than equal to the comforts and elegancies of life—their hearts and tastes, and what was of far greater importance, their religious principles in unison, they might almost be said to commence on earth a foretaste of those immortal joys they were humbly preparing themselves to participate in hereafter.

Ann Morton, though their frequent guest, resided generally in her humble dwelling, with, as she expressed it, in her peculiar phraseology, "her soul packed up, and ready for departure." Mrs. Belgrave was Mrs. Belgrave still! unwilling to believe that she had yet lost all the attractions of youth. It is difficult, indeed, for the wisest of us to remark the advances which time, that silent destroyer, makes upon all human creatures.

The same feelings animate the bosom—the same glowing warmth—the same exultation—the same capability of delightful emotion, long after the cheek has lost its downy bloom, and the sparkling eye its fire—happy are those who make the discovery that they are growing older, particularly happy are women in so doing, before the fatal fact is forced upon their recollection in that unceremonious, inflexible manner, in which nature's great truths are generally taught.

To return for a moment to Matilda and St. Aubyn. Happy in the present and not anxious for the

future, they truly realised the so often quoted, but seldom experienced description of the poet. To them it was indeed,

> All various nature pressing on the heart:
> An elegant sufficiency, rural quiet, friendship, books,
> Ease, and alternate labour, useful life,
> Progressive virtue, and approving heaven."

THE END.

AUG 16 1943